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Spaces for the spirit: Christian spirituality as represented by Australian media

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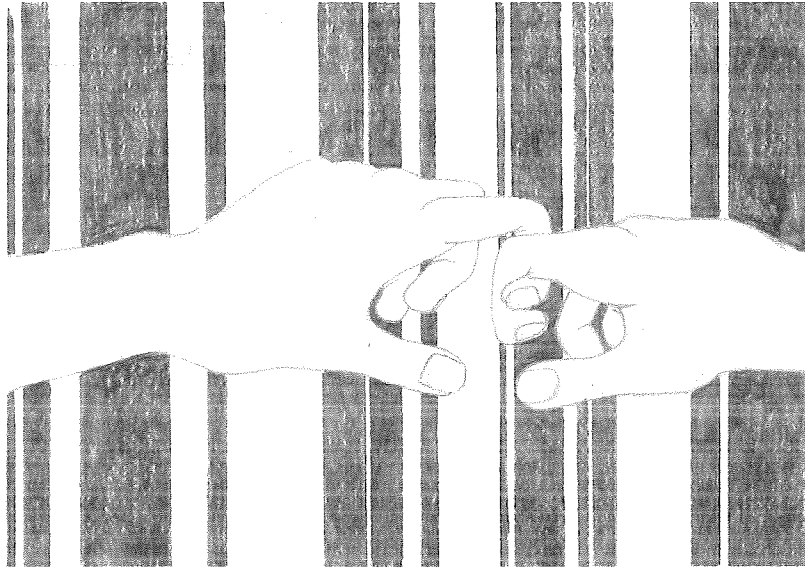
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JENNIFER JONES

**MEDIA STUDIES
HONOURS THESIS**



SPACES FOR THE SPIRIT
CHRISTIAN SPIRITUALITY
AS REPRESENTED
BY AUSTRALIAN MEDIA

SUPERVISOR : DR LELIA GREEN

COMMUNICATIONS, HEALTH AND SCIENCE
EDITH COWAN UNIVERSITY
DECEMBER 2000

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The Use of Thesis statement is not included in this version of the thesis.

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Also this thesis does not, to the best of my knowledge and belief contain any defamatory material, or any previously published or written material by another person except where due reference is made in the text.

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Spirit is the voyager, who passing through the land of man, bids the human soul to follow it to the Spirit's purely spiritual destination. (Heller cited in Hofstadter & Dennett, 1981, p. 121)

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KEYWORDS

**SPIRIT SELF SACRED RELIGION IDENTITY
MEDIA CONCIOUSNESS FORGETFULLNESS
CHRISTIAN PLEASURE DESIRE**

INTRODUCTION

An enquiry into Christian spirituality rests rather awkwardly in media studies. The omnipresent and atemporal nature of spirituality is also sacred and somewhat private, and difficult to establish, especially in terms of media representations.

Being so inherently difficult to define, the most meaningful place to explore the spiritual:media interface is in a plurality of audience opinions. This study has developed a focus by asking Christians how they think God is being represented by Australian media. There is no intention to prove that the Holy Spirit exists. Rather, Christian spirituality is taken as a given, and audience responses are sourced from people who identify as Christian.

This Judeo/Christian focus may seem unattractively centric in today's postmodern ethic, however, simply by prioritizing the Holy Spirit as a valid phenomenon of interest in media studies – perhaps at risk of commodification or omission for example - is a process that can serve spirituality in general. It is a focus that may lend itself usefully to other communities of belief for further critiques about media and spirituality. Such critiques, in a wider study of faith orientations and the media, would contribute valuably to this area of research.

Anglican Archbishop Ian George believes that 'the big divide will not be between the different faiths, but [between] those who believe in a creator and those who do not. (George, cited in Eccleston, 1999, p. 2). Western media maintains a conceptual gap that is resistant to the idea of spirituality, but whatever gaps may distance communities of belief, it is a collective that is in need of media attention. A more active interest in communicating spirituality may be rewarding for audiences, however, an attitude of openness towards various spiritual entities may demand a creative intellectual effort that does not compete with established systems of ethics. Media professor Manjunath Pendakur stresses that we need to use communication institutions to build understanding between cultures:

not simply to celebrate difference, as some would have it, but actually to understand and build critical links whereby we appreciate each other, and to change each other. You know, not everything in a particular tradition is good...so every community would have to give something up in order to build that bridge. (Pendakur, 1996, p. 7)

An overarching aim of this thesis is to explore the possibility of relocating media meanings about Christianity away from representations that perpetrate assumptions about *moral tasks of religion*, and towards the more important and cherished collective values of *pleasure and desire*. The intention is not to condemn the media, but to identify distance between entrenched concepts in dominant media discourses about the Christian religion, and meanings that are available in the Christian community. Religion is not in itself, spiritual meaning. It is a vehicle for meaning, and sometimes meanings are damaged, or even lost. While the word 'religion' is well understood and widely used, and consequently, used frequently throughout this thesis in citations and respondents' comments, it is hoped a more intimate discourse on the communal experience of 'spirituality' can be served.

This research does not have the scope to offer empirically grounded conclusions. Rather, it aims to develop questions by drawing from literature and from a snapshot of audience views. The conclusion that is offered may be somewhat broader than what might have emerged from a more controlled study, however, the value of the project lies more in an intent to open dialogue than in conclusive ideas. While some ideas might be reached discursively, they are introduced for the sake of discussion only; there is no scholarly intention to present conclusions as representative of the audience response. Indeed, the audience sample is not representative of any Christian audience other than themselves. From a Christian viewpoint, a cross cultural / generational / gendered audience profile is of little relevance, since the particular:universal nature of the Holy Spirit is believed to be neither specifically cultured, gendered or aged.

The working definition of spirit as 'the intelligent non-physical part of a person; a prevailing mental or moral condition or attitude' (Oxford Dictionary and Thesaurus, Tulloch, 1995, p. 1497) may be helpful, however this meaning will not be imposed on this study. Griffen stresses that a western insistence about spirituality being 'non-physical' is something that is being challenged at a time in communications history when the concept of the human body is under escalating threat. It is becoming more pressing to value the 'profound presence' held by the body, and to wonder if traditional Judeo-Christian thought for two millennia has 'skated on the thin ice of a dangerous illusion: that spirit is excluded from matter' (Griffen cited in Springer, 1996, p. 25). Problematically for Christianity, the Neoplatonic worldview, that all matter is evil, had a catastrophic influence that worked to stratify the early church (Farrell, 1997, p.4). But the view that all spirituality is mere superstition is equally dangerous.

Matter and spirit are at the heart of debate in neurophysiology, an interest that Cornwell notes as having 'bitterly opposed factions, as well as some marauding lone rangers' (Cornwell, 1994, p26). Generally, spirituality is positioned in two domains of thought in the physiology of consciousness. Springer's chapter 'Deleting the Body' cites Professor of Mathematics at Oxford University, Penrose, discussing consciousness as an action that is made up of an 'essentially non-algorithmic ingredient' (Springer 1996, p 23). In this domain spirituality can be respected as subjective and communal, and not mathematically definable.

Another positioning of spirituality envisages human thought and emotion as entities that are reducible to binary code. However, Christian spirituality resists observation, and such interpretations may prompt communities of faith to reclaim the human body as the only entity that can represent our spirituality. This is not so simple when one considers the body's increasing involvement with communications technology (alphabetic code, computer code, telephones, speech recognition), and biotechnology (organ culturing and transplants, microbiological vaccines, nanotechnology, genetic engineering, embedded computer chips). Cleaving to the organic real is no longer entirely possible, and positioning the physical body as a critical site for communicating spirituality will demand a review of our reliance on technology.

INTRODUCTION TO ARGUMENT

The spirit:media interface is investigated helpfully from a media studies perspective, because, although faith validates in the private individual, its trueness or falseness circulates initially in public discourse before such meanings are explored. If spirituality is given no space, negative space, or misrepresented spaces, private decisions require a greater disenfranchisement from the public sphere.

Media, Culture and Society book reviewer Jozajtis states that the relationship between religion and the media needs to be taken seriously, and he calls for 'boldness to go on and exploit the discursive possibilities' inherent within this area of communication studies (Jozajtis, 1998, p. 522). He cautions, however, with a citation from Hoover and Lundby saying 'it is presumptuous to suppose that any theoretical perspective can ultimately account for [this] phenomena of concern' (Jozajtis, 1998, p. 524). As one respondent in this study points out:

God is not something beyond human experience...[God] comes out in all the little things that make up daily life...[However] all the theological discussions about this and that, [disagreeing] and pulling of beards [is futile]...It is stupid really to try and define God because God is something that is beyond human understanding. (RESPONDENT 2)

This project rightly resists a definitive plan of interrogation. Before any questions can be asked, problematics around self, identity and God need to be considered. And somewhere in-between is the idea of soul. To integrate this within the relatively new tradition of media studies may ask questions about power, nation, policy and ownership, as well as the generic communications concept of time and space. It could look to systems of enquiry offered by O'Shaughnessy, such as psychoanalysis, structuralism, genre, authorial intentions, audiences, historical contexts, ideology and

hegemony (O'Shaughnessy, 1999 pp. 53, 93, 140, 179, 251, 220). In addition to this, a look at media and spirituality will also encounter contradictory perspectives on the human condition that, characteristically in postmodernity, both helpfully and problematically coincide.

Given that there are endless combinations of inroads to research, an even greater problem presents in methodology. The topic is intrinsically subjective and cannot be managed by any model of enquiry without scholarly tension. I am conscious that my own place in the collective Christian experience, as a dimension of deep importance to me, is a position that needs to be made clear to readers of this research. I imagine however, that people of many spiritual orientations might share my interest, and possibly concerns. In this I sometimes take the liberty to write in the third person. Perhaps by revisiting our sense of communicating our spirituality, we may be more enabled to address the tremendous burdens and confusions surrounding progress. Perhaps we may even identify with our spirituality for the first time, or find new ways to enjoy it. Perhaps our spirituality is not affected by media at all.

Many other streams of enquiry are beyond the reach of this study. A number of media texts are offered as a way to talk about the spiritual sphere, however production perspectives and content have not been analysed in any depth. Similarly, political issues surrounding current economic relationships between the state, the media and the church will only be touched on. Important theological aspects, such as the Judaic Holy Spirit (Shechinah) being the same spiritual entity that Christians identify with, has also not been addressed. Likewise, Christian belief that the Word of God (Holy Bible) is

a living text, inspired by God to give enduring sacred meanings, has not been explored. Popular concerns about televangelism have not been considered at all.

It remains a priority to engage a collection of literature with a portrait of audience perspectives about Australian media and God, to stimulate further dialogue about communicating spirituality.

HISTORICAL AND CONTEMPORARY ORIENTATIONS

It is helpful to think about historical ideas, to understand where humanity might be now, and directions it may be going in. In hindsight one can see how the sciences rebelled against the authority of the church. And one can watch with interest how postmodern thought is playing havoc with the authority of science.

Despite crumbling metanarratives, Sire positions postmodernism as 'the last move of the modern' (Sire, 1997, p. 173). The project of modernity continues through the physical sciences, advancing even to the point of pressing into our genetic composition. And the social sciences have rationalised a secular value system for our moral ideals and passions. Resulting progressions in social justice and technology might be impressive, but personal interconnectedness has atrophied. Has this impinged on our spiritual wellbeing, and delayed spiritual growth?

The concepts of selfhood, identity, soul and spirit are enduring ideas that offer a background to issues surrounding the communication of Christianity. These ideas have been supported by ongoing intellectual efforts throughout major movements in western

thought. However, new dialectics about mediating spirituality can be drawn with both ease and difficulty from postmodern thought. With ease - as a fresh subjectivity. And with difficulty - in the fear of it becoming a totalising ideology.

On an easier note, humanity and the environment can be positioned more openly as primary media for communicating the Holy Spirit; as a physical media in communion with a spiritual God, whereby the *whole spectrum of communications code* is used. Wright talks about an interconnectedness, where 'there is a relationship...between human and plant life' (Wright, 1999, p. 88), a view that is clarified further by McGrath's positioning of the environment as God's creation, and *something that is not divine itself* but as an entity that 'God's nature and character can be known through' (McGrath, 1999, p. 80). Likewise, popular scientific discourse has no power here:

God's truth is in everyone...in Romans 1:19 [reading] *since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain*, this reminds us that we all have knowledge of Him. But not all of us choose to recognise Him, some people try to work things out for themselves. His creation is not something to worship but is something He has given us, to point us to Him. In Job 12:7-9 it says [reading] *ask the animals and they will teach you, or the birds of the air and they will tell you, or speak to the earth and it will teach you, or the fish in the sea...* David loves to speak about God's creation in the Psalms, like in Psalm 19 he talks about nature... [reading] *The heavens declare the glory of God, the skies proclaim the work of his hands, day after day they pour forth speech, night after night they display knowledge, there is no speech or language where their voice is not heard...* To worship nature would be like if your friend makes a beautiful dress or cooks a nice cake, and you give all the recognition to the creation and not the creator.

(RESPONDENT10, Direct reading in italics)

This (post-religious) dialogue about a direct relationship with God, where humanity and the environment are spiritual entities created with a physical presence, is one that meets with resistance from both scientific and liberalist worldviews. Christian thinking

occupies a space that has been largely abandoned by the Western world, a space that was once institutionally dominant, but is now more personal and marginal. This abandonment leaves a commercially unviable space for the spirit in mass media.

Crane suggests that early literary representations of the Holy Spirit may have contributed to a delay in the personal experience of God, a process that has culminated in what he describes as a 'modern forgetfulness'. As dynamic explorations in recent thinking are putting God, the self and the soul under great investigation, Crane reminds readers that the spirit was sent to bring humanity and God together (Crane, 1999, p. 3-6). Is media responding to contemporary explorations of God, or is it defaulting to outmoded codes of religious ideology, diverting desires for intimate spiritual meanings to places where there are more marketable pleasures? If this is happening, does the Holy Spirit work around such practices? Could spiritual truth possibly even be inadvertently served by the very practices that seek to monopolise it?

TECHNOLOGY

Communications technology is another helpful focus for an exploration of the spiritual:media interface. Christians value personal communication in the temporal dimension of the present as an essential spiritual activity. But when communicating via media technology, time and space are violated. This is becoming more of an issue as the 'overall trend in mind research is towards scientific reductionalism' in a move working towards a 'propagation' of consciousness by 'promissory materialists', which is 'gaining ground in mass culture, more as a result of its easily digestible conclusions...than in the authenticity of its proposals' (Cornwell, p. 26).

Davis (1999), Horsfield (1991), and Porush (1998) have interesting contributions to make when considering technology and spirituality. Davis considers the sociocultural:technical interface as one that is 'recovering cultural fictions', and proposes that spirituality has transcended into a kind of technological ideology as a form of self salvation. Horsfield identifies parallels in repetitive audience behaviour to that of religious ritual. And Porush positions the communications turn that we are experiencing now with the Internet, as ground-breaking as the power disruption effected by the first phonetic alphabet.

Blackmore defines the term 'memes' (first coined by Richard Dawkins in *The Selfish Gene*) as one that was invented to include 'tunes, ideas, catch-phrases, clothes, ways of making pots or of building arches, scientific ideas, religions, fashions, ceremonies, customs and technologies - all of which are spread through technology by one person copying another' (Blackmore, 1999, p. 38). This is a convenient way to conceptualise how cultural meanings in our new hyper-representational sphere are compressed into, hybridised with, and circulated, through technology.

Technology has played an important role in the communication of spirituality, and this role is met with both resistance and enthusiasm. Investigations into social, political, emotional and physiological dimensions and tensions can help understandings on how the sacred is impacted by technology. Ultimately however, at this point in time, it is perspectives and attitudes (held and circulated by senders and receivers) towards the sacred sphere, that shape media meanings more than the technology itself.

FORM AND CONTENT

Relationships between the media and Christian spirituality can be explored through the concepts of form and content. Firstly, it is important to establish that spiritual meanings can be found in unlikely places, and representations of God are not limited to religious programs. Theorists such as Kingsley, for example, see religion functioning in soap opera as 'a binding agent...a declaration that we share beliefs, hopes, fears' (Kingsley, 1989, p. 11), and Modleski describes daytime soaps as supportive to women's roles in life, and as 'moral and spiritual guides' (Modleski, cited in Geraghty, 1991, p. 43).

Spirituality can be conceptualised as the central underlying narrative to most media representations, even if simply as a good:evil binary. Sport can be conceptualised as offering parallels to Christian spirituality in terms of communal liveness, and similarly, the coverage of events such as Princess Diana's funeral can foster spiritual solidarity. The issue of live communication is a recurring theme, and real-time broadcasting may hold important possibilities for representations of the sacred, possibilities that may not be available in pre-recorded forms.

This chapter will draw from respondents comments to explore how various forms communicate Christianity, for example in advertising, autobiography, soap-opera, music, film, oral storytelling and comedy. A broad focus on content could draw on technological, social and ideological coding conventions, as discussed by Fiske (1987, p. 5), to demonstrate how the difficulty of representing God is eased by the use of codes such as morality themes, motifs and music. Social and technical codes such as stereotyped religious characters and Gregorian chants, together with ideological codes

such as prescriptive moral narratives, continue to be reinscribed by media. And religion is a well-used device for the ideologically interrogating role of comedy.

Brand advertising is a particularly important form to consider at the spiritual:media interface. Dyer notes 'advertising nowadays fulfils a function traditionally met by art or religion' (Dyer, 1982, p. 2). Such artistic and religious functions can be observed in the branding practices of corporations such as clothing design-house Benneton, whereby negotiations of deep social injustices are aestheticised for advertising campaigns. The marketing practices of brand advertisers work to cut across demographics and create new markets by drawing on spiritual values. Nike gained market leadership after a campaign constructed product value by enabling consumers to identify with a desire to empower African American street kids. Campaigns on luxury commodities, telecommunications and life insurance products continue to capture new consumer audiences by mimicking spiritual desires such as love, freedom, friendship and trust.

The public media interface with religion may be seen as performing particularly well. ABCTV products such as *Compass*, and ABCRN's *Religion Report*, *The Spirit of Things*, *Encounter*, and often, Philip Adams' *Late Night Live*, offer engaging academic critiques. The SBSTV social-documentary vignettes in *Front-up* could be regarded as a progressive form to facilitate dialogue for communities of faith.

Commercial television might be seen as delivering tokenistic programming, with cheap imported religious fodder to fill early morning 'God slots'. An exception to this is Oprah. As for the press, the metropolitan press seems silent, but specialised publications are

booming. Spiritual concerns and desires are communicated through the Internet in discussion groups and communities of prayer. Corporate philanthropy has emerged as a site for communicating Christianity, and one that provokes controversy.

Overt media discourse on spirituality appears healthy at the margins, but meanings are more elusive at the core. And while time and space restraints in traditional media remain as problematic, Christianity is represented with varying degrees of openness in music, animation, dialogue, oral storytelling, autobiography, and live communications.

MEDIA AND THE SACRED

Christian spirituality has endured a long history of authoritarian religious regimes, opposition from scientific ideology, and commercial colonisations of meaning in media. However, despite these restrictions, a decentralised church hierarchy and renewed spiritual sphere have emerged, in a movement that is increasingly referred to as 'The Second Reformation'. Christian consciousness can be seen returning to its eastern origins, whereby, as Vos explains, the Cappadocian founders of the eastern church, Basil the Great, Gregory of Nyssa, and Gregory of Nazianzus, conceived of God as inter-relational and communal, rather than hierarchical (Vos, 1994, p. 24).

Although media may negotiate a sense of the sacred through explorations of popular New Age cultures, they are not prepared to negotiate meanings about Christianity that lie beyond established religious rhetoric. Media can be seen as reluctant to represent sacred meanings in their fullness, and when confronted by meanings that lie outside established social and religious ideology, media is resistant. The ordinariness of an

everyday relationship with God, in normal everyday life, is as equally problematic to media as extraordinary, extra-rational dimensions of Christian spirituality.

Davis discusses sacred:media relationships as an unconscious drawing on pre-modern 'myth' to process the complexities of modern life. But in our market driven ideology, spirituality that can be perfected in media, might be failing in the real. As noted earlier, spirituality and religion are two very different things, and this difference is possibly the most difficult aspect for media to grapple with when representing God to audiences. The theoretical constructions of class, gender and race for example are predominantly visible dimensions and comparatively easy to refer to empirically. Similarly, the regalia and ritual of religion is tangible; we often see God represented ceremoniously in births, deaths and marriages for example. The spirit is not explicitly visible however, and this difference should not exclude it as 'an unavoidable basic conceptual dimension' (Jagtenburg & D'Alton, 1989, p. 3) of social space. Five of the twelve respondents put forward this set of concerns:

I think that the media classifies Christian spirituality and religion as one thing, as a belief system that someone subscribes to, rather than a relationship to God. Christian spirituality is about a relationship with a living God, [whereas] I think the media [represents Christian spirituality] as a movement, as a group of people who have a certain set of beliefs.

(RESPONDENT 3)

Religion is man made, and man gets religion and God mixed up.. there's a lot of talk on religion but that's not how God sees it, God's not interested in religion...when we talk about the church it is the people, not the building [and] the church has a lot of work to do to get where God wants it.

(RESPONDENT 4)

When I go to school lots of people say 'are you Christian' and then I say 'yes' and they say 'oh you must be one of those religious guys', and they just think that I spend all my time praying to gods and sitting in temples and that sort of stuff, they don't see Christianity as being different from any other religion...[the difference being] that we don't

have to do anything, we just have to say 'yes' to Jesus, and I think people and the media, they just don't get that, they just think Christianity is just another religion...Most of Christianity is not physical, it's more spiritual.

(RESPONDENT 8)

When I was living in Switzerland I thought there were only two kinds of [Christian denominations], Catholic and Protestant...I was brought up in the Evangelical Protestant Church as a nominal Christian, I was always taught what was in the Bible, what was right and wrong, but I did not have what I have now, a personal relationship with God, because God was too untouchable.

(RESPONDENT 8)

I would like to see the media getting away from all the emphasis on religion and paying more attention on the essence of things - the deep personal relationship with God which is at the heart of a Christian's life.

(RESPONDENT 7)

Newman reinstates that many cultural historians have regarded religion, in some of its historical forms, as a significant obstacle to personal and social freedom, as authoritarian and politically, intellectually, and emotionally confining (Newman, 1997, p. 12). Sacred values are harder to access when representations of Christianity are encoded as religion. Values such as passions for truth in friendship and community, may be defaulting in media to substitute meanings such as moral correctness, commodified pleasures, and a prohibition of the unpredictable real.

PLEASURE & DESIRE

This chapter proposes that sites of 'pleasure' and 'desire' are dominated in media by aesthetic constructions of sexuality in popular culture, and by constructions of commodities as satisfying in consumer culture. This simplification can be contested because pleasure is also available in various resistances to such dominations, however

pleasure and desire are primary experiences of the sacred that are noticeably absent in media representations of Christian spirituality, and they need to be reclaimed.

Once again, advertising is a fruitful genre to explore this area of concern. For example, in an explicitly raced newspaper advertisement for Toshiba, a post-colonial play with The Lone Ranger and Tonto invites elite consumer readers to transfer the pleasures of friendship, and a desire for spiritual oneness, to the wonders of laptop computers.

A core concern for Christians is that representations of God are closely aligned in the media with religion. Defunct religious rhetoric - such as the notion that getting in good with God has rewards – when perpetrated in media, makes a mockery of spiritual meaning, especially meanings about pleasure and desire. A wealth of spiritual meaning is present in the immediate world around us, and Berry, Chew and Cowdell discuss the importance of the environment to communications of spiritual meaning. And in a spiritual revival, Indigenous Australians are bringing new experiences to the Christian community.

Can media communicate the mysterious pleasures of agape love and the spiritual venture of a communal relationship with God? Or is media ideology defaulting to more manageable meanings that will not disrupt the traditional tradable moral core?

CONCLUSION

While this thesis acknowledges that all sacred orientations are valid spiritual entities, the particular focus in this research is on Christian spirituality. Twelve respondents have contributed valuably to open up the topic, as well as to give it depth.

In this thesis I have investigated Christian spirituality and the mass media, demonstrated the importance of spirituality to human experience, and asked if media could communicate this reality more openly. While technology expands and limits spiritual meaning, a number of historical and ideological orientations towards the Christian tradition have become entrenched in media culture, and work to impede the communication of contemporary meanings.

A shift in power relations in late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries has allowed Christianity to move from a community governed by hierarchical (even monarchical) regimes, to a highly inter-relating body; a decentralisation that is frequently referred to as 'The Second Reformation'. Problematically however, much unresolved historical 'baggage' surrounding religion complicates media representations of Christianity today. Mass media could work to construct spaces for wider concepts within the Australian Christian experience; a diverse community of faith with identity in its 'oneness'.

Farrell points to powerful interventions imposed by western philosophy on the early eastern Christian church, and cites Gunton explaining its 'terrible consequences', which progressed a massive displacement upon the Christian identity of communal oneness,

to an identity enmeshed in hierarchical meanings (Farrell, 1997, p. 8). Clouse, Pierard, and Yamauchi are cited in that the separation of clergy and laity became differences of worth (Farrell, 1997, p.5).

In the past, dominant religious regimes have used media to colonize spiritual meaning, and today, in a public display of correction, contemporary media can be seen as a valuable instrument in repudiating such regimes. However, these well-intentioned challenges to religious imperialism have not been open to the wider possibilities of sacred meaning. Instead of mass media taking steps towards recognizing extra-rational experiences of spirituality as a valid dimension of social space, it appears to be cringing under secular morality regimes, preferring to manage spaces for the spirit within established and oppressive frameworks of religious ideology. Communities of faith experience their identity as one that is marginalized, perhaps even oppressed, by mass media. Christians who practice their faith in more traditional ways are chastised as ritualistic or morally demanding, and, evangelical, charismatic or miraculous dimensions of Christian spirituality are positioned in the media as irrelevant, weird, irrational, impossible or even dangerous.

Rather than representing Christian passions that have emerged and are alive and well within the community, media can be seen as representing and critiquing religious ideology that is residual. In a somewhat disenchanting media environment, elaborate morality discourses have become a poor alternative to 'religious' rhetoric, while new 'post-religious' spiritual dynamics are disallowed. Fears of religious imperialism in the media have not subsided.

When Australian communications minister Senator Richard Alston recommended the outsourcing of religious programming for the ABC, James Murray (1998), the religious affairs writer for *The Australian*, noted that 'outsourcing religious programs would cause disharmony among the faiths'. Arguing from a legitimate concern surrounding the issue of funding for marginal or less financial faiths, Murray recommended a watchdog role for the ABC. He notes that the proposal to outsource religious programming:

would lead to jealousy, charges of discrimination and favoritism, perhaps even anathemas and excommunications...Eager religious groups, hell bent on purveying their more extreme forms of ideology, *without any critical analysis or balance* [would be competing with groups such as the Scientologists who have been] recognized as a religion by the High Court...[a situation that would become] out of control, given the terms of the anti-discrimination and racial vilification legislation. (Murray, 1998, p. 9, emphasis added)

This concern has the capacity to overshadow interests wishing to open up communications for communities of faith. Media is trying to offer intellectual integrity, equity, balance and choice in times of rapid change, perhaps by drawing on Roseneau's 'skeptical' model of postmodern thought for media ethics management. Skeptical postmodern thought opposes *any* notion of a coherent subject, especially any ideology that may become totalizing. This position is at odds with 'affirmative' postmodern thought, which forms new subject positions to decentre dominant logocentric narratives (Roseneau, 1992, pp. 139,144).

Such a dilemma is significant for communities of faith, who are relatively free in the affirmative postmodern model, yet denied any coherence or notion of difference in a skeptical model. Media ideology prefers to take refuge in the safer politics of the skeptical model where established morality norms about pluralism will not be

challenged. With not too distant memories of religious domination, and continuing incidences of corruption, hypocrisy, and hostile religious factions, this is hardly surprising. Talk about God remains taboo for commercial broadcast media at the turn of the twenty first century, posing huge moral/intellectual, and hence, commercial risk.

Despite this, audiences are quite aware that religion has often been a convenient shelter for certain sectors of the community to further their own political interests; sectors and interests that have nothing to do with God. And peaceful Christian communities are more widespread than aggressive factions. Spaces for the spirit emerge in unlikely places, and, in the willingness of the communicator or the sensibility of the audience, spiritual meanings are available at any given moment. But mass media could play a more active and healing role in building understanding about spiritual orientations, if it could find a way to openly represent communities of faith without threatening its stance of inclusivity.

For Christians, the question remains as to whether or not, amidst such failing traditions and the depthless conditions in postmodernism, media could be moved to revisit the elusive entity of spirituality as an important consideration for media representation. Or must communities of faith retrieve their spiritual sensibility by creating 'media free' spaces in their day, in a further alienation from the public sphere.

This project looks beyond discourses about power and seeks to probe attitudes and possibilities for the future. Hopefully it will contribute to recognizing the importance and worth of human spirituality in communication studies.

METHODOLOGY AND LITERATURE REVIEW

METHODOLOGY

This project aims to develop ways to understand relationships between the Australian Christian consciousness and media. The purpose is not to invent something new, but to make it easier to talk about the extra-rational sensibility of spirituality that is apparent in the community and available in literature. An anarchic body of writing has been regrouped and synthesised with open-ended interviews. And what was threatening to become 'a riot of subjective visions' (Hansen, Cottle, Negrine & Newbold, 1998, p. 30) has been managed within theoretical and interpretive frameworks informed by Rosenau (1992), and Jagtenberg and D'Alton (1989).

Spirituality is a socially-integrated experience between the divine, the other and the self, and is a dimension of humanity that is particularly easy to understand as 'communication'. It doesn't matter if, as Bullock, Stallybrass and Trombley explain, metaphysics might be contending with one real substance or many preferred existences (Bullock et al, 1988, p. 524). What matters, is that as communities of faith communicate with each other, and with the world around them, they feel free to openly acknowledge what they feel in their spirit.

Spirituality has survived various monopolies of meaning in media. However, the word 'meaning' is a problematic one.

[S]ense-making varies conceptually among researchers, depending what view on the psyche is assumed...we have to accept that researchers working with, say, psychoanalytic horizons have a different notion of sense-making than those with a cognitive psychological background...How can we relate findings predicated on [extra-rational] premises to ones anchored in other psychological traditions or in linguistics? [Let us] remind ourselves that at present, consensus on even such a fundamental term as 'meaning' is less than total, since it is predicated on differing theoretical traditions. (Dahlgren, 1998, p. 309)

The approach to 'meaning' in this research has drawn from literature of various traditions, and, while no area of research could attempt to identify absolute relations between spirituality and media, I would rather 'atone for the limitations of my methodology', integrating respondents views with literature as 'an inductive methodology for illuminating social processes' (Miles & Huberman cited in Jensen & Jankowski, 1991, p. 73), than to understate the significance of the topic or avoid the issue altogether.

The first tier of research is a small audience study whereby media consumers who identify as Christian have been interviewed - under the overall guidelines of a set questionnaire - about how they felt their spirituality is being represented by Australian media. Questions were kept as open-ended as possible without compromising their aim. This methodology shares Morley's goal to 'gain insight' (Morley, 1986, p. 51).

The second tier of research has sourced text-based inquires on historical, cultural and religious ideas concerning Christianity and the media, with the overall aim to construct a manageable research orientation and to create a systematic link 'between the *micro-social* and *macro-social* levels of analysis' (Jensen, et al, 1991, p. 74, emphasis given in original text). Spirituality is an intimate knowingness. However, it is also revered as a

dimension that is overarching, inter-relational and autonomous, a system of meaning that is beyond the boundaries of both media determinism and audience subjectivity.

The audience sample was not obtained through any application of probability theory and at no time seeks to be representative of any population. While a more representative audience demographic could have been used to develop useful information, this particular snapshot of opinions has been drawn on primarily to 'break the ice' and open up the topic. The audience profile is more of a research artefact than a tool in itself. Age, gender, ethnicity, denomination and income indicators were not used to claim relevance to outcomes. Indeed, for this area of research, the usefulness of demographic indicators is imaginably very limited, and one could even expect an equally diverse response from a more homogenous profile, especially in Australia.

At worst, this sample's responses may be lost in the vast possibilities of the topic. At best, this sample will offer enough dialogue to stimulate a productive interest in relationships between media and spirituality.

Approaching this study from a Christian position can be both valued and problematic to maintaining methodological integrity. I recognise that having a faith orientation that is the same as the interviewees is entering into this research with a degree of common subjectivity. However, other qualitative research methods would inherit an equally inevitable share of subjectivity. On a more positive note, a research project can value subjectivity as helping to establish trust and openness, and possibly even facilitate a deeper response. Christian spirituality demands leaps of logic that can be difficult to

convey, especially to a critical mind, or in response to questions with an underlying academic agenda. In this I stress that particular care has been taken to anchor all audience citings within the context of their responses. Audience citings should at least hold acceptance as a valid representations from this particular sample.

Focus groups were considered as an alternative research tool, but these also require an 'active input and structuring on the part of the moderator' (Hansen, et al, 1998, p. 283). The results may have invited additional controversy in that they would be skewed by 'groupthink', a tendency whereby cohesive groups are 'reluctant to cause disagreement or provide unsettling information' (Bartol, Martin, Tein, & Matthews, 1996, p. 278). However, this methodological weakness may also have been a strength. When spirituality is considered as not only a personal experience, but also a collective experience, it is possible that groupthink may have worked to serve the topic better. Focus groups foster a more rigorously interacting dialogue that may have offered a more productive exploration of attitudes or an in-depth analysis of a specific text. Focus groups do hold a logistical disadvantage however, in that they can restrict group attendance. In this audience sample, one person lives outside WA, one is a student without a car, one was visiting Australia with a busy schedule, and one was working out of Perth. This dynamic could only be represented by a flexible researcher, who is prepared to fit in with each participant's preferred time and place.

The selection process for the audience sample was considered as important only in terms of whether or not participants felt they had a real choice in participating. All respondents were given two opportunities to decline in their participation, firstly at the

time of their initial invitation and secondly just prior to their interview. While no one declined to be interviewed, one person asked if they could respond in writing because the issue was 'of too great importance' for an oral interview. Due to distance, one other person responded over the telephone.

Seven of the respondents were known to me at the time of the study (see Appendix 4). Of these, one is a close personal friend and another is a family friend. The five unknown respondents were sourced by telephone requests to ministers of religion. Two respondents asked for reassurance about the anonymity of responses. Friends and family visited another respondent for about 30 minutes in the middle of the interview. Despite these variations, participants were all briefed with the same pre-interview information, all interviewed in places of their own personal choice and at their preferred times, and were all asked the same questions.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This thesis draws primarily from two texts to establish a theoretical and interpretive framework. Jagtenberg and D'Alton's formulation of dimensions of social space gives the topic a speaking position and allows a voice for respondents. Rosenau's simplification of postmodern thought as either affirmative or sceptical helps to manage the collisions between Christianity, the media, and politics of pluralism.

It is hoped that a new orientation in Media Studies can refocus with an openness towards spirituality as a legitimate inter-relational given throughout humanity. Such a focus might resist traditional outer meanings and, in far more demanding communication forms, invite an inner authority. Media discourse on spirituality needs to be 'simplified up', to be freely discussed in everyday terms, away from inaccessible or competitive discourse, and reductionalist categorisations of meaning such as 'religion'.

To progress this idea, I have borrowed from Jagtenberg and D'Alton's theoretical perspectives on class, race, gender and environment, to position spirituality as an everyday reality and an underlying 'dimension of social space' (Jagtenberg & D'Alton, 1989, p. 1). To progress harmony for individuals, society and nature, it may be helpful to look to spirituality, perhaps as a version of the vision that Jagtenberg and D'Alton had in mind:

if sociology and the social sciences are to continue as critical in nature and capable of exposing not only naive assumptions about progress, but the actual conditions of daily life, 'warts and all', practitioners need to reflect against the breadth of interest of the relevant disciplinary fields...*What is missing...is a broad focus on the whole field of individual-society-nature.* This absence arises because a highly professionalised academic system means that the individual systems that deal with various items of the whole are limited in the range of their intellectual authority. (Jagtenberg & D'Alton, 1989, p. 446 emphasis added).

This study shares this view, in that representations of spirituality are restricted by 'governing assumptions' (Hartley, 1992, p. 46) that are validated by popular intellectual authorities. These authorities construct moral myths to address ongoing concerns about the economy, education, science, energy, health, culture and the environment. Problematically, despite this highly developed rationale, explicit discourse on spirituality

is almost impossible for the media, unless it is retrieved and resent encoded in elaborate morality meanings.

In seeking to break through this briar of authority, it will become apparent that the further removed any discourse on spirituality is from the problems of equity and power, the easier it is to talk about spirituality with effectiveness. While the interrogation of power and equity has been an enormous moral victory for Cultural Studies, they are age-old issues that continue to show no sign of going away. At the turn of the twenty first century, spirituality is increasingly deserving of attention as a valid social space, and, in Rosenau's affirmative model of postmodern thought, need not be problematic within a pluralistic society.

It could be argued that there are many other dimensions of social space that are of equal importance. Levels of education, city and country backgrounds, and age differences all carry currencies that can work against harmonious social interaction and cohesion. However, from a premise that there are tensions between *all* religions - and especially towards the Christian *institution of religion*, due to a history of dominance and many incidences of treachery - this study proposes that spirituality, as a separate entity to religion, is a critical underlying dimension of social space, that shares similar concerns about ideological misrepresentation in the media as does class, race, gender and the environment.

Rosenau's Anglo / North American 'affirmative' model of postmodern thought, which 'moves the margins to new subjectivities' (Roseneau, 1992, p. 144), allows more

subaltern voices to emerge in the politics of periphery and core. Affirmative postmodern thought proposes a return of the subject, encompassing more optimism than her European 'sceptical' model. The affirmative model supports a range of new political movements from peace, ecology, environment, nationalism, populism, and communities of resistance (Roseneau, 1992, pp. 57, 144).

Alternatively, Roseneau's 'sceptical' model of postmodern thought subjects every position to a more stringent intellectual scrutiny. This is sometimes showcased as moral scrutiny under the umbrella of liberalist and humanist thinking. For Christians to talk in the media about God relating to them individually and through the environment is tolerable, but for the media to position the Holy Spirit as universal (even as a diversity of human souls as particular parts of this universal) is to tread on difficult ground. This holistic version of diversity, of the individual communing with the omnipresence of God, invites argument. Plagued by memories of dangerous and ongoing misappropriations of ideological power, sceptical models of postmodern thought prefer to revolt against any universalising view. As Barnes notes, 'it is a highly provocative thing to say in these postmodern times that the Christian gospel can provide an alternative meta-narrative for public life' (Barnes, 1999, p. 76).

Firstly, as Barnes explains, 'some kind of meta-narrative which frames public life...is unavoidable...[however] larger truth claims that challenge the notion of tolerance of lifestyle choice [are] soon met with liberal intolerance' (Barns, 1999, p. 79). So what might be allowable in affirmative postmodern thought, is disallowed in sceptical models.

Secondly, in a continued frustration about power relations, Barnes makes the point that Christianity is not (or at least should not be) interested in a shared spirituality that comes about by imposed consent. The issue of choice was important to this person with the question: In what ways do you feel God communicates to the world?

God communicates [to me] when I let Him really, or when my eyes are open and I can see, it is my willingness to see the communication. I think from God's point of view it is happening all the time...I do believe it is I who decides...so I believe we are free and I don't think God imposes.

(RESPONDENT 11)

Christian spirituality is informed and maintained by the experience of God's love.

[T]he universalising claims of the gospel...are not based on an ontology of violence but an ontology of peace...the conception of truth implicit in the gospel is not coercive. It does not violate the 'other' because it is ultimately grounded in the self-giving trinitarian love of God, a love that is inherently communicative and indeed constitutive of the other's freedom. (Barnes, 1999, p. 76).

An exploration of media meanings about Christianity needs to go beyond fears of it becoming a dominating ideology. We need to ask if profound meanings, such as those reported by Piggin (1994, p. 266), are possible in mainstream media. It might be important to reclaim our spirituality in media as a normal human given that can be communicated openly and constructively to build understanding and friendship.

Literature relating specifically to the topic was difficult to source. *The Australian* newspaper, theological journals, and two unpublished manuscripts from Crane (1999) and Farrell (1997) offered helpful insights. Apart from contributions by Davis and Crawford (May 1999), Jones (Dec 1999), and Pendakur (Aug 1996) on ABC Radio National, this enquiry has drawn from literature in communication studies, cultural studies, philosophy and theology. A loose categorisation of where these contributions

have come from can demonstrate much crossover within these disciplines, however literature addressing the media:theology interface was scarce. Of the twenty-one theorists and commentators writing specifically about media and theology, (or media and religion), nine were given in one book by Arthur (see Appendix 5).

Extensive research through the Internet may have served the topic better. Spirituality is emerging as a growing topic for academic discussion, and the immediacy of Internet publications can be a fertile source for current opinion.

HISTORICAL & CONTEMPORARY ORIENTATIONS

It is well established in media studies that the very act of recording a communication changes its meaning, firstly by removing the message from the bodily control of the messenger, and also by compressing time and space with practices such as editing, printing and transport (see Innis (1991); McLuhan (1967); Ong (1982); Goody & Watt (1987); and Heyer (1988)). In the pre-literate age, however, societal groups could share their spirituality in direct relationships through song, dance and oral communication, and one can imagine that the spirit:media relationship was closer. The pre-literate age compares intensely with the twentieth century whereby humanity has experienced exponential growth in media technologies, a growth that can be seen as outperforming media technology change over the previous 5000 years. Humanity and the environment were then, and still are, primary media for the spirit; and face-to-face communications have a powerful role in mediating spirituality.

Historically, media institutions have used communication technologies to control the flow of data one way, usually from the top down, with the general exception of telephony. This is evident, for example in the strict regulation of television production and broadcasts in many developing countries, or in the editorial control wielded by owners of press institutions in the developed world, in order to nurture commercial interests of client advertisers. More recently, interactive media technologies have created flows that are more of a two-way process, however, the newly broadened source of bottom-up data continues to flow mostly from educationally, financially and technically privileged groups.

During such developments, little attention has been reserved for mediating spirituality. In an increasingly commodified age, media institutions compete for our every moment in the free markets of a globalised society, and communicating our spirituality is not considered important. Our world of omnipresent media demands that we relinquish our time in a shift towards ever more compressed communications, an experience that further detaches us from organic human relations and sacred quietude. Is technology a continuum that is distancing us communicationally from the earth, and from God? Or is technology beginning to serve our spiritual need for collective human relationships?

One respondent offers this view:

With the internet and things there is so much possibility open to people, but when you're communicating on that scale you don't know who you're communicating with, and when you're talking about being in touch with God and Christ you need person to person contact... I mean media can help you discover that there is a God, but if you want to find out more about Him and his people you have to go to them, you can't sit on your own and do it through the internet.

(RESPONDENT 5)

For Babin, 'spirit only occurs deep in the wisdom of the body, in the integration of the senses and the heart, and the total decision of love, which should be the first concern in the aims of communication' (Babin, 1991, p. 97).

Likewise, John Paul II ascribes to personal friendship, noting that the practical wisdom of philosophy was easily confused with higher esoteric speculation. He describes the apostle Paul as having 'put the Colossians on their guard' with the caution 'see to it that no-one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to elemental spirits of the universe, and not according to Christ [Colossians] 2:8' (John Paul II, p. 59). In linking religion and reason in early philosophical thought, John Paul II notes:

Reason [today] needs to be sustained in all its searching by trusting dialogue and sincere friendship. A climate of suspicion and distrust, which can beset speculative research, ignores the teaching of the ancient philosophers who proposed friendship as one of the most appropriate contexts for sound philosophical enquiry.
(John Paul II, 1998, p. 53)

This chapter will give a brief orientation to western selfhood, identity, soul and spirit. Although such ideas are hardly manageable here, and surrounding issues will be in need of further attention, it is hoped that this positioning of such ideas can offer a starting point at least. Making distinctions between spirit, self and soul in the tradition of western thought can be particularly restrictive to contemporary meanings about Christian spirituality. An understanding of Christianity is difficult to access through intellectually definable understandings, and meanings rely more on a spiritual relationship with God. Christianity is moving closer to its eastern origins whereby more holistic and experiential meanings are preferred.

Crane notes that the mystery of the spirit is difficult to represent and is often termed in non-anthropomorphic ways such as wind, breath, fire and oil; all of which may have contributed to a 'delay in the Early Church's pneumatology, and [in] the admittance of *full* personal divinity of the Spirit' (Crane, 1999, p. 3). Crane speaks about a 'modern forgetfulness' in the twentieth century that stems from literary beginnings about the Holy Spirit and the ordered ministry of the institutionalised church. This *modern forgetfulness* appears to be still entrenched in media, at least with regard to the Spirit:

The Holy Spirit is sort of like God's messenger...I just think it's like your conscience sort of thing when you're doing something and you know it's wrong and the Holy Spirit is the thing that just comes up to you and says, taps you on the shoulder and says 'nuh, you know that's not right, back off'...and I think the media just don't see it in the same way, not the bigger power and meaning that it has for Christians, the media

forgets that it is really big, like it's one of the main three, and [yet the media] just reduce it to a dove or something. (RESPONDENT 6)

Crane cites Kasper saying 'theologians frequently call the Holy Spirit the forgotten God' and that a major consequence of this is the formation of 'a new triad of God-Christ-Church' (Crane, 1999, p. 1), in place of Father-Son-Spirit. Crane warns that church hierarchy was 'never commissioned to do the work of the Spirit' and '[w]hen institutionalised, the Spirit is unable to accomplish what He is sent to accomplish...the immanent activity [to] bring humanity and God together' (Crane, 1999, p. 6).

For Christians, the Holy Spirit is all that remains of God on earth. While this may manifest in many ways, Christian identity can be understood in terms of a relationship with God through an abiding of the Holy Spirit in one's soul. Jung's explanation of this positions the Holy Spirit as something that is experienced when consciousness and unconsciousness reach a new level. 'The Holy Spirit is the result of a coming together of both the unconscious (the Father-Creator), and the conscious (when the Son entered the body of man)...[whereby] *we can become the dwelling place of God*' (Clift, 1983, pp.154-155, emphasis added). The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit make up the Christian consciousness that, as Farrell explains, is what we 'somewhat abstractly describe as God...[a] community of Love...with individual personalities and gifts within it, yet only truly having identity in its "oneness" as a whole body' (Farrell, 1997, p.1).

The idea of soul has held our attention for thousands of years. To the western mind, the soul is generally definable as a personal part of the individual self. This differs from the spirit, which is both personal and communal. Blackburn notes that 'modern

philosophy of mind has frequently been concerned with dismantling the cluster of views that make it plausible to think in terms of [the soul]' (Blackburn, 1996, p. 357).

Despite a lack of agreement, it may help to position the soul as particularly important in terms of identity. In an exploration of relationships between spirituality and media, the soul remains useful as the 'immaterial "I" that possesses conscious experience, controls passion, desire, and action, and maintains a perfect identity from birth (or before) to death (or after)' (Blackburn, 1996, p. 357). Cultural studies propose that 'the self' is a social construction, and central to the self's consciousness are many identities such as gender, ethnicity, or socio/economic positioning. This study positions the self's spiritual orientation, (Agnostic, Atheist, Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Jew or Muslim, for example), as very important to our everyday social identity. The soul can be thought of as the site of negotiation for positions on spiritual identity.

Blackburn describes identity as problematic in terms of how we change over time - an issue that Locke tried to solve with the idea of a 'unity of consciousness', and in particular 'memory of past actions'. Hume viewed identity as 'a kind of fiction [similar to that of] a nation or club' (Blackburn, 1996, p. 283). To mediate spiritual identity in Australia, one imagines a diversely represented multicultural society. On an aesthetic level this is already working well, for example on ABCTV station ID's. And at the point of reception, spiritual meanings are inherently possible for active, constructive viewers.

To further understand identity we can draw from Hall, who notes that identification is best understood as an ongoing process, a fullness that we desire - made up of the

pleasure of plenitude - which can only be filled from outside us as we imagine ourselves to be seen by others (Hall, 1994, p. 119). Esser builds on this, in reviewing Bauman's essay in *Questions of Cultural Identity*, by saying that the postmodern consumer does not see the advantages of durable identities any longer, but views them as a liability (Esser, 1997, p. 481). This presents concern that a culture fearing a loss of options, may, in a process seeking to maintain all options as possible, lose whatever is remaining of its own spiritual identity.

Hall offers a helpful historical summary of three major movements in western thought that affected the individual subject. Firstly, the *Christian Reformation* permitted a personal relationship with God, and salvation through faith rather than good works. Secondly, *Renaissance humanism and its scientific revolutions* redirected understandings of man through individualism and nature. And thirdly, the *Enlightenment* centred on rational thought as being able to master an understanding of everything (Hall, 1994, p. 119). This culminated with Nietzsche's claim that 'God is dead...we killed him in the Age of Reason' (Moltmann, 1981, p. 13).

In the nineteenth century, Darwinism put religious beliefs under intense interrogation, and Christian spirituality was eventually – at an intellectual level at least - dismissed as irrelevant. This inheritance may have contributed to a spiritual cringe in Australia, and explicit media discourse on spirituality, from any orientation, may still be deferring under the tenets of scientific ideology. Although postmodern thought has rebelled against such regimes, the Christian religion has also been dismissed, leaving only a small window of acceptance for new meanings in Christian spirituality.

Hall outlines four major ideas in European thought that contributed to a dismantling the modern subject. The first is Marx's *displaced individual*, which grew from the idea of a universal essence of man as being inter-relational. In this, Hall cites Althusser as saying that Marx banished the subject and empiricism not only from political economy, but also from history, ethics and philosophy itself. Secondly is Freud's *unconscious self*, which claims that our identity and desire are formed through psychic and symbolic processes of the unconscious, outside the logic of reason. Lacan picks up on this by saying that the self is learnt, formed in relation to others through complex unconscious negotiations. Thirdly is Saussure's idea of *langue* (pre-existing language systems), and lastly is Foucault's genealogy of controlling *disciplinary powers* - such as the social sciences - that construct the identity of the modern subject (Hall, 1994, p.120 -123).

The self has undergone intense interrogation, and secularized plans to achieve peace and harmony for humanity have clearly failed. As Morley points out, metanarratives such as beliefs in 'rationality, science and planning in the cause of human emancipation and progress', are to be 'properly treated with suspicion' (Morley, 1996, pp. 58-59). Newman cites academic theologian Gilkey, who is also disparaged:

[T]echnological society promised to free the individual from crushing work, from scarcity, disease and want, to free him to become himself by dispensing with these external fates. In many ways, on the contrary, it has emptied...rather than freed the self by placing each person in a homogeneous environment, setting him as a replaceable part within an organised system, and satisfying his external wants rather than energising his creative powers. (Newman, 1997, p. 10)

Cowdell states that modern history 'is not the story of smooth progress towards utopian ends. Every one of our great gains has come at a price, and the blood-soaked twentieth century now ending has marked the unraveling of "equality, liberty, fraternity",

the death of modernity's great dream' (Cowdell, 1999, p. 93). After WWII, democratic and liberal ideals promised to meet humanity's desires for social justice, and the social-welfare role of the church was reassigned to the state as social security. Now in the early twenty-first century, the church is a competing contractor in a new relationship with the state, as social-welfare agent.

This heritage may have mixed implications for relationships between the media and spirituality. Societal goodwill and contentment is a fundamental human desire, however, a spiritual approach to maintaining such values appears to be forbidden by a secular regime of ethics. Popular media culture continues to position Christianity as a western metanarrative, and challenges or disengages with it as a failed religion. At the same time, media continues to re-inscribe the assumptions of scientific discourse, which continues to work to keep spirituality in check. Christian spirituality is rebuked as anti-scientific, and God and religious people are frequently represented as objects for ridicule. Communicating values of tolerance and diversity is popular, but personal truth about any spiritual identity is difficult, and may be especially taboo in the public sphere.

[It is difficult to explain what God means to me] because the number one thing about it is just [having] the faith that God exists, and trying to tell somebody about that is very hard in this world, especially because everything revolves around science and seeing things and theories and that sort of thing, and God just doesn't fit into that, they just say 'nuh, sorry', then the media...just capitalises on that because they know that a lot of people don't believe in it because they can't see it.

And yeah, like I've got a friend at school who really struggles with that because he's so wrapped up in the fact that you can't see God, where is He, why doesn't He come down and start healing everybody, if he's a loving God why doesn't He help us, yeah and just telling them that that is the case, it's really hard, and it's really hard for the media, I think that's why [the media has] stepped away from it, because it's too hard, and they're just not going to waste any time on it. (RESPONDENT 6)

Communities of faith are somewhat disenchanted by Australian media, with the view that it is an industry in spiritual cringe, cowering under commercial allegiances and intellectual authorities in the popular moral market. Perhaps this is a side-effect of a country having enormous appeal to the scientific community at the height of the natural sciences and the birth of the social sciences. Nonetheless, postmodern resistance to such authorities has served Christian spirituality well, and interest from the scientific community can be seen exploring the possibility of God. For example, Professor of physics, Barbour, took up the study of theology to construct a bridge between God and science, pointing out that 'science can tell us what's possible, but it can't tell us what is desirable' (Barbour, cited in Weiss, 1999, p. 43). Such open-ended interests may work to progress media spaces for the spirit.

Of greater significance, however, is the decentralisation of religious hierarchy into the church body. Newly decentralised Christian communities are finding a voice through subaltern explorations of the self, identity and soul, and are restoring authority to a highly inter-relating collective body of God. Hall notes the favorable postmodern conditions for media representations of culture at the margins:

I would go so far as to say that anybody who cares for what is creatively emergent in the modern arts will find that it has something to do with the languages of the margin.. The emergence of new subjects, new genders, new ethnicities, new regions, new communities, hitherto excluded from major forms of cultural representation... [these] have acquired the means to speak for themselves. And the discourses of power in our society, the discourses of the dominant regimes, have been certainly threatened by this decentred cultural empowerment of the marginal and the local. (Hall, 1991, p. 24)

This redistribution of power throughout the Christian religion is increasingly referred to as 'The Second Reformation', and will be an important shift to watch in media.

TECHNOLOGY

An understanding of the spirituality:media interface can be helped by examining technology. Communication historians, such as Innis (1991), McLuhan (1962), Ong (1982) and Carey (1989) have shown how the progression of communication technology from art and orality, throughout literacy, telegraphy, photography, and recently to digitalised technology, are media events that affect the way we communicate and the way we think.

While it is impossible to ascertain how spirituality may, or may not, have changed throughout the history of communications, we can enquire into how technology has shaped spaces for communicating the spirit. Porush, for example, proposes that the shifting effect of the internet will be equal to the 'massive cultural revolution' imposed by humanity's first written phonetic code, the Hebrew alphabet. The extensive syllabary of ancient Egypt was enormously threatened by the new code, a technology 'so potent that it only had to be invented once'. Likewise, cybernetics 'promises to supplant whole empires of alphabetic literacy...[in] the next step...of increasing the bandwidth and fidelity of telepathy' (Porush, 1998, p. 60).

A brief comparison of Hebrew and Greek alphabets can illuminate the effect of technology on communicating the sacred sphere. The Hebrew alphabet is not connected to the source of the message in the same way as the Greek alphabet, which has vowels and is phonetically more exacting. Hebrew is always contextualised with a

hermeneutics of 'openness', 'deferral' and 'multivalence', a uniqueness that may have contributed to a Jewish culture of 'resistance to authority' (Porush, 1998, p. 51-55). In a very different readership experience, Hebrew is poetic, with 'ambiguities of interpretation which can only be resolved by referring to extra-textual contexts: who wrote it, when, to whom'. Without vowels or upper or lower case letters, Hebrew reading skills activate the right hemisphere in the brain in an artistic activity, more demanding than the efficient lineal process of reading Greek, Latin or English alphabets, which involve mostly the left hemisphere (Porush, 1998, p. 46). Hebrew words and meanings have a unique relationship, as Green explains:

In Hebrew, *dabar* means both Word and *Event*. It is not something you see in space, like a written word is 'seen' on the page, [which is important when theologians] try to make sense of the interaction of God with the created order...For according to this oral cultural understanding, the incarnation of the Word is not so much the advent of an idea but a Word event - the Christ event. In the oral culture, the Word is always an event...Likewise, the spoken word can only be sounded by the application of inner power - it really is breath - *ruach*. That is why the word was always thought of as having powerful magical properties. Words cannot exist in time as sound without inner power being breathed into them. (Green, 1999, pp. 331-332)

By contrast, literacy derived from the subsequent Greek alphabet *held more authority* between the spoken and written word, a characteristic that destined it to become the key technological tool to serve and validate power regimes of Western scientific language. Goody and Watt discuss the ideological and technical dilemma of encoding meaning in terms of the 'long Greek enterprise of trying to sort out truth, episteme, from current opinion, doxia', explaining that in oral cultures words such as "God", "justice" and "soul" were not conceived of as separate, transportable, definable entities that could exist separately from a physically and socially interrelating speaker. Once the

messenger and message were separated in both time and space, and the message was assigned to the physically separate entity of writing, words 'took on a life of their own, and much Greek thought was concerned with attempting to explain their meanings satisfactorily, and to relate these meanings to some ultimate principle of rational order in the universe, to the logos' (Goody & Watt, 1968, p. 53).

Plato and Aristotle conceived 'a special intellectual procedure for [the process of assigning literate definitions to words]...a system of rules for thinking itself' which were 'distinct from the particular problem being thought about' and could offer a 'more reliable access to truth than current opinion'. However, both Socrates and Plato believed that the 'transmission of cultural tradition was more effective and permanent under oral conditions' (Goody & Watt, 1968, p. 53). Goody and Watt cite Socrates in that inherent advantages of speech include the virtues of question and answer, and the ability of speech to be sensitive to particular audiences. Knowledge attained from writing is shallow, but in the primary mode of communication, knowledge gains depth when it becomes 'written in the soul of the learner' through oral question and answer (Goody & Watt, 1968, p. 51).

In defence of non-literate communication, Goody and Watt cite Mencius explaining: 'Why I dislike holding to one point, is that it injures the *fao*. It takes up one point and disregards a hundred others' (Goody & Watt, pp. 60). This is a significant issue to interpretive communities of biblical texts, as discussed by Wainwright and Munro:

Polyvalence or multiple meaning-making is a product not only of the hermeneutical and methodological shifts of the latter half of the twentieth century, but also of the Christian community of the first century. The dialogue between the worlds behind the text and the

worlds in front of the text allows for (and even demands) plurality and play... (Wainwright & Munro, 1999, p. 80).

Phonetic code and subsequent communication technologies have inherent ideological significance. Technological advancements have been critiqued as either 'good' or 'bad' for humanity, and as Newman (1997, p. 7) points out, technology is well known for being a 'source of good in some ways and a source of evil in others'. Newman suggests that a line from the great ancient Greek Chorus of Sophocles's *Antigone*, 'many the wonders but nothing walks stranger than man', implies that classical Greek antitechnology had a religious foundation. While this view was considerably shared by Christian theology, it differed starkly at a point whereby the dominant Greek world view believed that appropriate rational discipline - as a doctrine of self-salvation through technological progress - could actualise harmony for humanity, whereas Christians believed that infinite destiny was constrained by finite power; that salvation must be by the other (Newman, 1997, pp. 23-25). Newman cites Russian Orthodox philosopher, Berdyaev, claiming it is not capitalism that is dehumanising and depersonalising humanity, but technology, our 'latest and greatest love', an affair involving idolatry at a time when 'we have ceased to believe in miracles, [but] we still believe in the miracle of technology [in a time] that is calling for a spiritual revolution that restores us to a hierarchy of values, above the idols of production' (Newman, 1997, p. 15).

Further consideration of 'pro'technology and 'anti'technology approaches to the technology:spirituality:media interface offers a third position, that technology is neutral:

The existence since the dawn of history of mass movements and totalitarian regimes indicates that political and social ills would still exist, with or without mass communications. One should not forget that

Moses, Confucius, Buddha, Jesus, Mohamed, and Marx did not have the benefit of today's sophisticated technology and advertising budgets, yet their points of view and their personalities still command a great deal [of] attention...Perhaps we have forgotten that the key to influencing people is, after all, ideas rather than technology. (Seiden cited in Newman, 1996, p. 14)

The dialectic about where technology and humanity meet is however, very divided. Protechnology people get annoyed about the 'romantic wailings' of alleged evils of technology, and the failure to 'distinguish technology from its applications'. But these failings are no less important than the central concern to religious antitechnologists, that technology is 'dominant at the expense of religion' (Newman, 1997, p. 11).

Davis suggests that the liberal American consciousness - whose dream has an emphasis on belief in self, the self that can 'know things' and orchestrate salvation through technology - has transferred a spiritual past into technology. He refers to technology's 'secret premodern history' that affects society, culture and consciousness, noting that technology has recruited its own believers in the newly emerged technological sphere. The libertarian view is:

rationalistic, hostile to religion often, although being libertarians they do not necessarily want to ban it, but on a level of deep structuring myth, libertarians do have a very spiritual side, they idolise the idea of freedom of vision, of light, that they can penetrate the great structures of government, laws and machinery of the state. (Davis, 1999, ABCRN)

Davis points out that modern techno-culture is not deeply spiritual in itself, but that 'the spirit has re-entered the technological terrain' in the form of archetypal myths of freedom and eternity:

We have religious dreams, drives and narratives that structure western consciousness...that have allowed us to feed into technology, so that even though we live in an apparently secular world...if you peel back the outer secular casing you'll find premodern wiring...Although we are

rather sceptical of the whole rhetoric of technological progress, we also feel on a visceral level that with the progress of technology - particularly with IT and bioengineering - we will build a fundamentally better world, a freer world, a world of the mind or a world whereby we are able to control the processes of death and decay.

And the more we look at these processes that we have channeled into technology, the more you see old religious drives towards building a better world, towards a new Jerusalem, it's just that we've secularized it, reproduced this idea of a utopia of light through our machines. (Davis, 1999, ABCRN)

Spaces for the spirit that may have been displaced from intimate human relationships, have, according to Davis, relocated at a subconscious level in our technological terrain. Crawford calls for a 'burning through' of the protechnology 'rhetoric of IT developers' and the 'utopian experiment' that has been going on since the industrial revolution (Crawford, 1999, ABCRN). And in an exploration of 'radical libertarian myth' Davis distances artificial intelligence and neurophysiology as 'a shift away from Christian or any other spiritual sensibility'. Downloading consciousness plays into the Cartesian mind:body duality whereby the 'body becomes irrelevant' in an 'ultimate human endeavour for human immortality'. Such 'achievement' is unlikely to consider the infinitely inter-relational body of the spirit. However, Davis points out that technology is notorious for working its own way through its laws of 'unintended consequences', and that in seeking out our 'visions and dreams of the pre-modern world' we may be given 'a different way to relate in a given moment' (Davis, 1999, ABCRN).

Australian cultural and scientific adviser Barry Jones points out that social theorists are now recognising a shift towards a 'hollowing out' of human communications, whereby despite impressive far reaching communication technologies enabling us to talk to anyone, anywhere in the world, at any given moment, we are not talking to our

immediate families and neighbours, and our inter-personal communication skills are atrophying (Jones, Dec 3, 1999). Cunningham cites Philip Adams alluding to similar sentiment in his comment 'pay TV is the cure for which there is no disease...[it is like] the fifth wheel on a motorcar' (Cunningham & Turner 1993, p. 332).

If the environment and humanity are primary media for communicating spirituality, it follows that this emaciating or 'hollowing out' process is a serious concern. Springer cites Heim, who warns that the loss of physical presence in virtual space may come with a loss of responsibility and morality, in that 'face-to-face communication supports a long-term warmth and loyalty', and virtual reality may result in 'unprecedented barbarism' (Springer, 1996, pp. 85-86). Similarly, Newman cites Roman Catholic philosopher Allers:

[T]echnologies [can] be subservient to human needs, [but can also] tyrannise man, not only because they create new needs, but because they alienate man from himself.. he is possessed by his possessions, slave of his creations..Man is about to conquer the whole world, including the interstellar spaces. But [w]hat does it avail him that he conquer the world and lose his soul?' (Newman, 1997, p. 13)

The concept of memes is a useful way to understand technology:spirituality:media interplay. The *Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy* defines memes as cultural objects or beliefs that can be replicated or passed on in a process of transmission that seems to have a life of its own (Blackburn, 1996, p. 237). Memes can be understood as replicated ideas *that travel through technology* but are controlled psychologically or culturally. In a similar manner to the way that the advent of writing 'changed the character of the Greek consciousness' (Havelock, 1986, p. 10), we can imagine that the character of consciousness today is changed by the transferral or trading of

replicated units of meaning that have hybridised with technology. Blackmore explains that memes survive because we copy them, some for good reasons, others for bad.

Memes [from the Greek word *mimema*, that which is imitated] are ideas, skills, habits, stories or inventions that are passed from person to person by *imitation*. Like genes, they compete to get copied but, unlike genes, their competition is for space in our memories and for the chance to get into books, magazines and television programs. (Blackmore, 1999, p. 38)

Respondent '12' spoke about the multitude of media meanings as 'pervasive', adding that most media meaning today is: 'worse than junk food, once it's in your mind you can't get rid of it, the same rubbish keeps reappearing in your thoughts'.

Planalp stresses that 'something is wrong if issues that matter do not engage our feelings', and asks why the study of emotions is not more important to communication studies. She cites Lutz, in that 'emotions give us gut reactions', in an age of information overload they 'orient us to what matters, not just to what makes sense' (Planalp, 1998, p. 67). Emotion and spirituality are complex extra-rational filters that process an inter-relational cosmology of information. Such information is beyond the reach of our physical senses, a reach that we know little about, as Liberman suggests:

We like to assume that we see the world as it really is, that our eyes give us a full and accurate picture of reality. Yet physicists tell us that the visible world is simply an illusion created by our senses, that even the most 'solid' objects are simply vibrational frequencies within a vast expanse of empty space. Our physical vision can only access a very limited frequency within a vastness of multidimensional reality, a tiny doorway called the 'visible' portion of the electromagnetic spectrum. We usually assume that only modern technology can sense information carried on the television, radio ultraviolet infrared microwave or x-ray frequencies. Yet...as our field expands we begin to perceive information that is supposed to be invisible to our normal senses. We know something before we are told, or we feel the movement of invisible energy, or we see an event before it happens. (Liberman, 1995, pp. 159-160)

Liberman explains that in an elaborate physiological system, messenger chemicals called neuropeptides make very sophisticated shades of meaning to communicate the brain's responses, beliefs and intentions throughout the body. According to Liberman, every one of our cells 'feels' our emotions and 'thinks' our thoughts, 'simultaneously materialising messenger chemicals out of nowhere to regulate our physiological responses' (Liberman, 1995, p. 14). This links interestingly with Lusetich, who, in writing about the spirituality of celebrities, cites Sanda Bernhard saying that studying the Kabbalah has 'changed my whole way of being. My DNA has changed, my energy, my understanding, my compassion, my level of tolerance and patience is something I never dreamed I was capable of' (Lusetich, 1999, p. 3).

In addition to neuropeptides, Liberman describes another chemical messenger that is emitted by people, plants, insects, and animals:

Pheromones [are] odourless hormones that are perceived by a mysterious gland in the nose...humans are constantly producing and emitting pheromones [which are] triggered by our thoughts and emotions, just like neuropeptides. We are constantly releasing neuropeptides within ourselves and pheromones outside of ourselves, emanating waves of intention into the atmosphere. So why aren't we reading each other's minds all the time? It appears that our gut feelings are doing just that, but we have learnt to ignore or dismiss them. (Liberman, 1995, pp.14-15)

David notes that we need to avoid becoming obsessed with communication tools and alienating ourselves from social relationships and a relationship with God, adding that representations of Christianity are as strong as the communicator's relationship with God (David, 1999, p. 255). Likewise, when Malcolm Muggeridge interviewed Mother Theresa for the BBC documentary *Something Beautiful for God*, he pointed out that the reality of Christ shines through the camera's fraudulence, through a person's strong

love for God (Muggeridge, 1977, p. 70). A reliance on God, rather than representational skills and devices, was important to this respondent when answering: *Are there any important aspects [of your faith] that you would like to see the media represent?*

I'd like to see [the media] represent all of it, but whether that is likely or not is a different matter...I mean, you can't stand and say "Oh I'm talking for God" - God talks through you, or He doesn't talk [at all]. It's not a case of "Oh I'll just do this for Him 'cause I think He might like it", it's [God who] does it.

(RESPONDENT 5)

David (1999, p. 254) draws from the book of Hebrews, 'God has spoken to us in His son' (Heb 1:1), and the book of John, 'the Word became flesh and dwelt among us' (Jn 1:14), and notes that 'Christian communication is characteristically personal...both the message and the medium...cannot be wrenched apart' (David, 1991, p. 253). He adds that we face the problem that as people we are integral members of bureaucracies such as educational, vocational, religious, recreational, governmental or economic, and our relationships are often more functional than personal, a concern echoed here:

There is a lack of communication between people, you know people just treat everything just like a job now and they forget about the person themselves, instead of getting to know the people, to understand what life is all about. We're not robots, we [shouldn't] try to figure out or try to say 'well these people are like this, or these people are like that.

(RESPONDENT 4)

Respondent '4' explains that 'Christianity is about a personal relationship with God, getting to know the Father, our heavenly Father, and finding out what He wants for our life'. Arthur (1992, p. 21) supports this view in that 'it is *people* who are the most important medium of all', and, it may be necessary to program 'media-free' spaces into our day, in order to nurture our spirituality with God, each other, and the environment:

What I find practically, personally, is that I reflect back to what has happened, and try to see why things have turned out one way or

another, and if I do, especially in silence, in the 'desert', I realise that God was present in that moment, even though I can see it better after the event has happened.

(RESPONDENT 2)

The relationship between media and spirituality is intimately intertwined, rather than a 'container : cargo' type of relationship. As Porush demonstrates, media technology is political, cultural, and metaphysical. Davis talks about how pre-modern myth has transcended into consumer psyche today. And Liberman rethinks our known spectrum of consciousness to proportions that only life itself can realise. And for this respondent, spaces for the spirit are not necessarily dependent by media technology:

I think God is not necessarily in the Christian church, God is far bigger than any establishment, organisation, anything on earth, and I don't think God speaks only through anything [exclusively] classified as Christian. I mean God spoke through a donkey to Barnabus, and God used a secular Persian king to speak for Him...Everything is in His control.

(RESPONDENT 3)

The *real* in the *present* are our most sacred resource, and as David McKie notes, 'environmental reality is not virtual, and equity issues must be addressed'. McKie adds:

Not everyone on the globe has access to food - let alone the internet...[a dream that] posits an impossible individuality incompatible with planetary survival...In valuing our biological heritage [a progressive focus] avoids the hype...offering a more responsible, more playful way to create myths about the future, while rendering the present more precious and more real. (McKie, 1994, p. 26)

At this point in time, Christian spirituality is not dependent on technology. The Holy Spirit gathers us in and communicates through our richest code – through the wellspring of the environment and the minds, feelings and will of humanity.

FORM AND CONTENT

Form and content are ways of organising a message and controlling its meaning. However, audience theory consistently asserts that meanings are activated by the reader; that the social orientations of the reader contribute more importantly to the making of meanings than the media texts themselves (Allen, 1987, p. 102; Turner, 1993, p. 303) and (Morley, 1980; Ang, 1985; Hall, 1980; Palmer, 1986; Eco, 1972 cited in Fiske, 1987, pp. 62-65). While the control of meaning may lie more in audience interpretations than in textual constructions, Munns and Rajan caution that 'the crucial factor in the encounter of audience/subject and text will be the range of discourses at the disposal of the audience' (Munns & Rajan, 1995, p. 300).

Respected thinkers over the last century have rendered the dominant ideology of Christianity as an anathema, or a convenience supported by the privileged classes to give the underprivileged hope. But spiritual endeavours in recent times, including a broadened re-opening of Christianity, appear to be gaining popularity. At an everyday glance, this shift is particularly noticeable in books, magazines and merchandising.

Imaginably, communication processes involving the audience, text and spirituality are very complex. Although such meanings can only be known in terms of personal experience as people construct their own spaces for the spirit in media, Christian spirituality is also fluid and communal, and occupies uncontained interacting domains such as intuitive love for the other. As Hartley explains, there is simply 'too much reality for [meaning] to be contained' (Hartley, cited in Fiske, 1987, p. 302).

Where media have responded positively to changes in the Christian community, spaces for the spirit are generous. Overt communications of God that would not have been tolerated a generation ago are finding their way through popular music and film. Even the fourth century Augustinian discourse of doubt and grace has been restored to popular culture in this African American dialogue about God:

what if I stumble
what if I fall
what if I lose my step and I make fools of us all
will His love continue.. (DC Talk, 1995, Jesus Freak CD).

This chapter will identify various media and genres, and, as a forum for respondents' comments, will ask how media might work to progress or retard spiritual meanings. No detailed analysis of content will be given. Instead, forms of advertising, autobiography, soap opera, comedy, oral storytelling, music and film, will be probed for insights and general discussion. The issue of live broadcasting, as an audience experience that cannot be replicated, is one that may be particularly deserving of further research.

Since most media - including public media to some extent - are essentially about marketing, it is helpful to consider constructions of the popular. During (1993) points out that quantitative market research fails to ask how cultural products are valued and used (During, 1993, p. 24). Consider how a Christian youth concert would be valued if it were to be broadcast on Triple J or Rage, and similarly, how different is the shelf life and audience reach of a car bumper-sticker compared with *The West Australian's* 'Text for the Day'. It is important to understand how audiences 'watch and interpret television and use it as a resource within their private lives, in the makings of decisions and the carrying out of [public] actions' (Corner, 1995, p. 4).

Schultze makes an important point that the term 'religious broadcasting' is deeply misleading because 'it implies that other programs are not religious'. Even if broadcasts are not made specifically for religious purposes, they may still serve 'the historic religious function of organising life around shared beliefs' (Schultze, cited in Arthur, 1993, p. 20). Representations of Christianity are sometimes explicit, such as in televised church services, or in the sharing of an experience such as doubt in an autobiography. Sometimes they are more implicit, such as symbols and narratives in brand advertising and news.

Horsfield notes that non-theistic studies show that humanity is inherently religious in terms of universal needs for narratives and ritual, and contends that the habitual watching of television can be seen as serving necessary functional needs of religious behavior (Horsfield, 1991, p. 2).

Traditionally, the rituals of religion were identified as serving the major function of transcending present profane time. The ritual act withdraws us from the ordinary world of mortality and limitation into a special space, time and action in which the mundane and finite is transformed into something of eternal quality. (Horsfield, 1991, p. 3)

Similar rituals can be imagined in today's technological domestic domain. The routine watching of television enables audiences to transcend everyday time, and television's repetitiveness is 'a significant parallel to liturgical practices', which orders our life in such a way that it becomes 'gratifying to live in harmony with the order imposed by this thing beyond' (Horsfield, 1991, p. 3-4). Horsfield adds that Marx's criticism of religion as 'the opiate of the masses' can now be applied to television, as 'the opiate of the twentieth century fatigued person' that provides 'a system of social interaction,

particularly in the field of defining taboos and reinforcing those mores without which social organization would disintegrate'. In place of 'mystery, revelation and tradition', television works through heroes in 'fantasy and humor' (Horsfield, 1991, p. 3-5).

Although spiritual experience is not threatened by differences in time or place, spaces for the spirit in pre-recorded media may be used and experienced by audiences quite differently to those spaces available in live-to-air media. Explicit meanings about soul and spirituality can be difficult for media to represent, and can be extremely disruptive to media form, and live broadcasting may create more intense spaces for the spirit than what pre-recorded forms may offer. It is possible, as Liberman suggests, that some meanings are available exclusively in the present.

[The] path to expanded awareness begins as we non-judgementally notice, feel, and communicate our experience in the moment. It sounds so simple, and yet we have such deeply ingrained habits of avoidance. We have forgotten that every time we suppress a perception or an impulse to speak, we limit our life force a little more... Sometimes we do have painful or frustrating experiences...but the intensity of the stress is often related to the degree of resistance to being fully in the present. (Liberman, 1995, p. 74-75)

Communicating in the present disallows compressions of time, and may yield profound spiritual meanings. Spiritual awareness may be enhanced by the collective experience, discussed by Anderson, whereby participating audiences are strengthened by the dynamics of a 'unisonance' imagined in 'a special kind of contemporaneous community' that is accessible in shared moments of reception (Anderson, 1991, p. 145).

This spiritual experience is well known to audiences that have shared in live transmissions of world events. However, spaces for the spirit are obviously not limited

to live broadcasts. For example, while Respondent '2' makes the point that the present is 'where God calls us to live', he also talks about hearing music that he has enjoyed in the past as a 'spiritual experience' that 'touches him very deeply'. Likewise, Respondent '1' conveyed that when he was younger and 'living in the bush', he would look forward very much to singing the hymns and prayers broadcast on radio.

Respondent '2' believed that the media always gives a 'light hearted' perspective of the world, and 'does not try to get people to think deeply about things'; it tries to 'create an immediate impact'. He said he didn't know 'how [the media] could possibly manifest an experience of God' because it plays to the popular interest of seeing 'the cedars of Lebanon falling down' and is bound to the commercial rationale of time restraints. 'Time is always creating a pressure in the media, so whenever they interview people they just want a simple immediate [answer]'. One exception to this was his favourite ABC Radio program *Search for Meaning*, by Caroline Jones:

She used to interview people, and some tremendous experiences of life came through.. on the part of believers and non-believers, what was it that moved people to act in such a way, what was underneath...she would ask 'what's really meaningful in your life, what guides you in life, what moves you, motivates you, what vision of the future do you have, what are you aiming at'...but it was done in a very unhurried way, there wasn't the impression to create an impact.

(RESPONDENT 2)

Another point made by Respondent '2' was that 'sad as an event may be...it gives you an enrichment, a better understanding of God':

There are some moments [in the media]...such as after the shooting in Port Arthur, how people got together and prayed and sought consolation in faith, that really amazed me because many of them would not have gone near the thought of God, and yet faced with a reality like that, they faced up to God in prayer *en masse* for consolation, for some lightening of the burden that they had...When

people are forced to think about something deeper...than a game, say going to the stadium or listening to some music...we can say even then that this is God touching us, God's voice talking to us, reminding us that life has a beginning and an end and even though we try in every possible way to avoid thinking about it, every so often we are forced to, especially when it is someone very close to us.

(RESPONDENT 2)

Soap opera plays with the notion of space and temporal gaps by representing the ongoing nature of life with textual devices such as resistance to narrative closure, multiple characters and plots, a liveness that parallels real time (implying that the action continues whether we watch it or not), and an emphasis on dialogue and domestic settings (Brown, cited in Fiske, 1987, p. 179). Cantor and Pingree note a function of soaps put forward by some researchers, that when society is represented as doing something wrong, soaps tend to 'support the status quo by ostracizing and punishing violators of moral standards' (Cantor & Pingree, 1983, p. 78). More supportively, Fiske points out that soap opera form is frequently disrupted, without resolution, a process that 'produces openness which can serve to interrogate the status quo' (Fiske, 1987, p. 179). The openness of soaps invites readers to construct spiritual truths as well as understand narrative truths.

The television series *Touched by an Angel* was a favourite for Respondent '9,' who enjoyed seeing the transformation of characters from people with a set of problems, to changed people, who have resolved their problems. The content in this classic storytelling form challenged the way society interacts with certain sectors of the community, asking audiences to engage in a venture whereby 'messengers from God' were ordinary people, usually with rather difficult problems - for example Down's Syndrome. This representation of angels challenges the stereotype of a long robed,

extraordinary perfect being, and constructs God's participation in the world in a way that serves to broaden spaces for the spirit in the media.

Respondents in this study conveyed little enthusiasm about forms of media representing Christian spirituality, and were often distressed by the content. However, to the question: *Have there been occasions when you have felt that the media has enriched your experience of God?*, some positive responses emerged. Music was frequently regarded favourably as giving space to the spirit. Respondent '12' said that apart from Christian music, which she enjoyed immensely, she was also 'deeply moved' by the steps taken to produce *The Prince of Egypt*, and enjoyed being reminded about her shared spiritual heritage with the Jewish people. Describing herself as an 'animation freak' she mentioned that other productions such as *Pocahontas* and *Mulan* focus on cultural and spiritual beliefs, and while she wasn't sure if *The Prince of Egypt* was a 'forum to invite people to believe in God' she believed that 'God often uses the secular for His truth'.

Several respondents spoke about public affirmations of belief. A younger interviewee felt that sports stars should not proclaim God as helping them win a game, because this may suggest to non-Christians that God is 'not on their side' a notion that he believed was 'not what God really wants'. Likewise, another respondent felt uncertain about singers attributing their success to God at awards nights.

[Y]ou see them at the Oscars or whatever, the music awards, with 'I'd like to thank God for' and I find that very strange, that God is there to make me a successful singer...to me that is funny...it shows how differently we see God...

(RESPONDENT 11)

Other interviewees regarded public affirmation was regarded favourably, for example:

I get very excited when I hear [sportspeople] publicly stand up and give glory to God, it is a testimony...there are movie stars, politicians, our Governor General, they come together with other politicians to pray...it's people in authority, people who are recognised who are taking a stand for Christ and are not afraid to speak it out just because they are going to be ridiculed and laughed at...that encourages me. (RESPONDENT 8)

The media form of autobiography supports deep communications of the spirit. Dalzeill notes that 'vigorous autobiographies of resistance to the oppression and denigration of the individual, are not only metanarratives of emancipation...but also grand narratives of faith' (Dalziell, 1999, p. 14). According to Dalziel, autobiography can be confessional or testimonial. 'Both the religious and therapeutic confession involve the revelation of shameful aspects of the self to another', while testimony has 'the potential to open up festering wounds in society, overcoming denial and facilitating healing, tolerance and reconciliation' (Dalzeill, 1999, p.16). Oral histories are similar in that they are personal stories, and when recorded visually, can offer a powerful direct address.

Oral storytelling (disregarding news for the moment) is a form of communication that is underdeveloped in electronic media. Perhaps the risk of losing audience share is thought to be too great in non-compressed organic forms of communication. However, oral storytelling may engage audiences better than more constructed communications, and may well be aesthetically more interesting and cost effective. Oral storytelling removes a layer of objective distancing, and is used 'to teach us deep thoughts...In oral cultures, knowing or learning means achieving close identification with the known...[which is why, for example] the Hebrew word for sexual intimacy is 'to know', because knowledge here is intimacy not information' (Green, 1999, pp. 331-332).

Jim McDonnell notes that oppositions in story telling such as light and darkness, good and evil, and heroes and villains serve to communicate spiritual ideas. And while 'the explicit connection between morality and religion has been largely severed, the focus on moral dilemmas, on issues of honesty, integrity, truthfulness, compassion and love, provide significant points of contact with religious feelings and values'. He adds that while television tends to 'domesticate the religious impulse', the 'immense popularity of fantasies and science-fantasy literature and films attract people to mythic forms of expression...releas[ing] the imaginations of those who find that everyday living has become dull and routine.' Popular films, music and literature search for the transcendent in a 'fragmented, mysterious and chaotic world' where 'mythic structures are frameworks for interpreting messy, confusing reality'. He cautions however that in the fantasy quest for meaning and authenticity, these implicit 'religious' values are strongly individualistic, rather than communal (McDonnell, 1993, pp. 94 - 96).

Arthur cites Khuns' *The Electronic Gospel*, whereby Khuns is concerned that 'the intellectual shift brought on by TV may have a profound effect on how we think religiously' and that 'the very concept of faith may be threatened by the incessant visual impact of television'. (Arthur, 1993, p. 6). Davies feels that that the communication strength of television is limited by time, hunger for colour and an intolerance for silence. However, he also argues that the visual potential of television has not been reached (Davies, 1993, p. 236). Sound is equally important, and just as 'white space' is a powerful device in print advertising, silence can be a powerful space for the spirit, as Babin notes:

The most important effect of the sacred is its creation of an inner silence. When everything has come to an end, we are taken to the

essential. The fragility of our being turns toward the burning bush: Take off your shoes: 'I am' is there, and all the rest is unimportant.. A good audiovisual religious program allows the peak moments to be reinforced by silence. [It] is not a void or a lack, but an intense moment in which.. "the word is made flesh".. Language is the union of words and silence. (Babin, 1991, p. 119)

When media content is punctuated by silence, sound-free moments of reception can expand into the reader's private space.

Today, film is a progressive medium for 'experimental' representations of God, and has a capacity to offer Christian spirituality space. The film reviewer for *Youth Worker Update* identifies an exploration of archetypal meanings used by creators of *The Matrix*, as a complex interweaving of storylines which work to create a conflux of archetypal and futuristic ideas for a wide audience. Writer/director Wachowski comments: 'We're interested in mythology, theology and to a certain extent, higher level mathematics'.

Youthworker magazine continues with this review:

Star Keanu Reeves is Neo, the 'one' - a Christ figure who will lead mankind out of computer-generated bondage. In Greek mythology, Morpheus is the god of dreams. In this movie, Morpheus is the leader of rebel forces fighting to awaken enslaved masses from dreamlike reality. In the Book of Revelation, Zion is the kingdom of God where the righteous dwell after the earth's destruction. In *The Matrix*, with the earth destroyed, Zion is the only city where humans are free. In the Bible, Nebuchadnezzar is a Babylonian king who wants to know the meaning of his dreams. In *The Matrix*, Nebuchadnezzar is a ship that visits a dream...The biblical traitor is Judas; in *The Matrix* it's Cypher. Jesus dies but returns to life for three days; the same thing happens to Neo. (*Youthworker*, 1999, p.13)

Comedy was an issue that emerged several times during interviews. For example one respondent spoke about struggling with being entertained by clever humour and a desire to respect God:

We used to be great fans of the program *Good News Week*, on a Sunday at the ABC, because it's clever...but now it has gone to channel 10 it's quite late at night and it's got really grotty, and they mock God, I don't watch it any more...that's just one program that delights in mocking God, and I find that those things really upset me...I think Australians are very good at mocking, it's part of our nature, and I think normally in some ways it's quite healthy and we quite enjoy that humour, but when it's mocking something that is dear to you, these things hurt.

(RESPONDENT 9)

Respondent '2' spoke at length on comedy, saying that while he was 'the first one to laugh about religion', he was also bothered about stereotyping and outdated codes, as well as simply poor comedy:

The media will present a minister as very stern, very serious, in the movies, and always with a terrible face. And always condemning people to hell...That's the classical way of presenting Christianity. And sometimes you see the monks with their hood down singing dirges, I fail to recognise myself to fit into that category. And they also use the *Gregorian Chant* (sings in Latin). I watch sometimes that Irish program about the priests...there is the old drunk priest, always drunk, and then the two young ones and the nun who tries to control them, I saw that a few times but it was so exaggerated and far fetched...I [lost] interest

(RESPONDENT 2)

There was strong response to the question: *Have there been occasions that the media has got it very wrong when representing Christianity?* Respondents '1' and '9' voiced disappointment in local media commentators on Christianity, Respondent '9' explaining that one can 'become so accepting of everybody's point of view that [they] don't have a stance at all'. Misrepresentation was also a problem. Representing the fallibility of Christians was happily accepted, but repetitive stereotyping and subversions of Christian leaders was not. Comment from Respondent '9': 'if you look at a fictional storyline [that has] a person who is a minister, he is usually portrayed as someone who is very weak and ineffectual', suggests that drama has not progressed far in terms of communicating Christianity. Further comment reflected tones of distress:

most of the time God is portrayed as something to be mocked, and Christians are treated as simpletons...the media doesn't pose the positive aspects [of Christianity] at all... Sometimes they say something that makes you flinch. I just want them to lay off mocking God.

(RESPONDENT 8)

Similar anguish was conveyed by Respondents '8' and '2':

On the radio...they take the mickey out of God, out of people that are trying to do the right thing, they ridicule. The majority must not know God or they would not say what they say, or do what they do. They are not taking God seriously, and I feel really sad because if they knew God they would not treat Him as they do...they live in ignorance.

(RESPONDENT 8)

There are some professional atheists who are very famous in the media, who are around practically every day, they give more emphasis to agnosticism, or open negation of the existence of a supreme being as the origin of everything, as we Christians believe, so God normally is left by the side...religion is normally [represented] in a disparaging way.

(RESPONDENT 2)

When asked: *Are there elements of your experience of God that you do not see represented by the media?* one perspective given was:

I know God as a loving God, one that doesn't relish in passing out judgement to other people but...when I see it in the media...they see Him as somebody who is up there in the sky passing out judgement to people and just doesn't give them a second thought...so I think the loving, the caring side of God is wiped out by the media.

(RESPONDENT 6)

Postmodern forms of dialogue may have the capacity to bridge this gap, especially communications that are privileged by immediacy or the present. Cissna and Anderson cite King, pointing out that after 2000 years of communication models emphasising effective speaking, the postmodernist shifts the focus from the 'elite speaker' to emerging 'muted' or 'subaltern voices' (Cissna & Anderson, 1998, p. 92). Forrester shares this view:

Authentic dialogue is impossible if it is assumed that one side *has* both truth and power in its hands, is the giver, the authority, the possessor of truth, and the other side is simply the passive recipient of the

communication, of the truth. The powerful prefer this model, and find true dialogue to be profoundly disturbing, precisely because it encourages people to question established certainties. (Forrester, 1993, p. 70).

Postmodern dialogue is possibly the most progressive form, or space for the spirit, because it can serve the needs of the spiritual collective. Sampson is cited saying that dialogue is helpful in that it de-emphasises a 'possessive' or 'contained' self in order to 'take conversations seriously' (Cissna & Anderson, 1998, p. 92). Dialogue, however, can challenge popular ideology, and may present risks that media normally avoids. Popular discourses on diversity and tolerance, for example, may be threatened by some dialogues, as Lorenzen suggests:

[D]ialogue is only possible if religious people are encouraged to affirm their identity, and then in openness and anticipation [they] can enter a conversation with "others"...[T]he fear often voiced by "pluralists" that the Christian claim to God...leads to imperialism, is misplaced and is not helpful to dialogue.
(Lorenzen, 1999, p. 43)

Cissna and Anderson note that careful and thoughtful listening brings about 'a profound interest and faith in the other, and a willingness to engage others on their terms'. Dialogue, is 'more likely to be surprising, raucous, and momentary than predictable, orderly and sustained' (Cissna & Anderson, 1998, pp. 79, 92). Taylor and Saarinen note in *Media Philosophy* that 'for those who still believe in the dream of transparent intersubjectivity or an ideal speech community.. misunderstanding constitutes fear [but misunderstanding can also] release energy. The law of the media is the law of dirty hands: you cannot be understood if you are not misunderstood' (Taylor & Saarinen, 1994, p. 5). Interestingly, while Christian spirituality can be represented with greater transparency in the tumultuous two-way terrain of dialogue, it has not altogether

collapsed under specialist devices of construction that characterise one-way forms of communication. At the time of consumption, spirituality has a way of seeping into any media representation, even in the oppositional space of 'what is not told', as a one respondent explains:

Sometimes [people in the media] may not be allowed to say all the things that they wanted to say, I have often sensed the things that they didn't say, it was like I was in tune spiritually, I knew their heart...it was just something that I discerned.

(RESPONDENT 8)

Davies suggests that television program makers are yet to seriously develop two-way interactive programs that offer 'genuine dialogue', although current affairs discussions and some entertainment programs have been tried. Co-productions with religious communities may be one way to achieve this, which Welsh language channel S4C has endorsed at policy level. Davies also suggests that the religious needs of children need to be considered, as well as the spiritual needs of groups on the fringe, outside religious institutions (Davies, 1993, pp. 241-243). Local language and culture productions are privileged at S4C, in a corporate policy that makes a good model for Christian broadcasting. 'In terms of ratings, the hymn-singing program *Dechrau Canu*, *Dechrau Canmol* achieves viewing figures of soap-opera proportions, with around 100,000 viewers each week out of a total Welsh language audience of [around] 500,000'. S4C is a 'potent national symbol' and has the freedom to schedule more than twenty hours of Welsh-language programs a week in prime time, including magazine programs and documentaries (Davies, 1993, p. 236).

Central to commercial media is the highly condensed media form of advertising. A thirty second commercial is cited by Slinger as the '30 second dream', that aims to 'sell us

the unnecessary... creating new desires and making old ones obsolete [and is] a very lucrative business'. Mainstream advertising has the potential to propagate fear and self-doubt, telling us to fear nature and uncleanness (buy chemicals to keep bugs away, sunglasses to keep eyes safe, detergents to whiten our clothes), to fear what others think and to fear loneliness (bad breath, dull hair, underarm odour), fear pain (buy analgesics for everyday ailments) and to buy products which will ensure love, relationships, happiness, and success (Slinger, 1993, pp. 200-201). Advertising during Christmas and Easter is prominent and cyclical examples of misrepresentations of Christianity in the media, as this respondent conveys:

I think the media really get it wrong when they are in it more for profit instead of communicating, like for example, things like Christmas and Easter. They just really make it revolve around things like 'quick, come in we're having a Christmas sale'.. and your first priority is supposed to buy things for everybody, and they just either just don't get it, or they've just totally forgotten that Christmas came about because of Jesus.
(RESPONDENT 6)

Paradoxically, such misrepresentations can be imagined (albeit simplistically) as creating a class problem in reverse. Rather than being supposedly emancipated by high incomes and material wealth, the financially privileged are more likely to be subservient to business concerns, and oppressed by demanding involvements with the consumption process when choosing, financing, displaying, storing and replacing possessions. Such commitments leave people with little time for a relationship with God, and more at risk of becoming spiritually alienated or deprived. Christians may construct such a notion from biblical scripture: 'I tell you the truth... it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle [a small door in a city wall] than it is for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God' (Matthew 19:23).

In discussing the magnitude of the advertising industry - which wouldn't exist if it didn't get results – Cover says that we are the 'tools of the global corporation' who create and disseminate the idea of 'salvation through profits and growth':

Individual consumption, private cars, refrigerators, and expensive medical technology have received more emphasis than safe drinking water. It is appalling to realize that human beings outside our own countries have become of less importance to us than the 'cat pianist' who demands 'Meow' cat food, or the dog whose welfare...is contingent upon 'Chunky' dog food... The corporate decisions can become the locus of free collective sins and increased injustices. The media... so dependent on the commercial world for financial support, reinforce and legitimise our corporate sin (Cover, 1993, pp. 214, 216)

Cover stresses that even televangelical preachers are not addressing this problem. She asks whether they would continue to be successful (in terms of audience share) if they preached more about community participation and alignment with the poor, than individual salvation evidenced in material rewards; if they talked about 'transformation of' rather than 'accommodation with' the status quo (Cover, 1993, p. 216-218). Rather than progressing spaces for the spirit, Cover senses regression in such communications, in that there is an abdication of spiritual responsibility.

Journalist for *The Australian*, Simons, explores the 'moral pulse of Australia' and the 'profit and principle' mix, noting that morality brings to the surface age old questions 'that have troubled philosophers since Plato...Immanuel Kant [for example] argued that a decision cannot be truly ethical unless it conflicts with self-interest' (Simons 1996, p. 4). Corporate philanthropy between industry and the church has evolved with particularly developed forms of communication. Sophisticated marketing strategies navigate a fragmented sense of the sacred, and address prevailing desires for social equality by sponsoring the church in community projects. Some commentators see this

as promptings of the spirit, however, Simons cites Deakin University management lecturer, Greg Wood, reminding us that corporate codes of ethics are regarded as 'valuable commercial secrets' (Simons, 1996, p. 4). While the Christian community may celebrate such supportive relationships, believing that God uses even the secular for His purposes, they are also painfully aware that this corporatisation of compassion is a cosy relationship that could survive – albeit superficially – without God.

Children's retreat

An inner-city games zone.

Inner-city Sydney can be a cruel place for many people. Children play in highly protected and well-walled spaces. But thanks to the Baptist Inner City Ministries, a lot of these children now have a haven that offers some respite from the surrounding world.

Two years ago, the Inner City Ministries formed the Kids Klub, a unique organisation designed to give children a bit of what is rightfully theirs – tenderness, fun and hope in a caring environment.

If the children have to thank the Kids Klub for this ray of hope, the Inner City Ministries and the Klub have to thank the St George Foundation, which has given \$50,000 to help establish this service.

Co-ordinated by Margaret Martinez, the Kids Klub operates one afternoon each week. With a strong accent on Aboriginality, Klub helps work at teaching these children how to help themselves in a positive and relaxed atmosphere.

The children go on outings – they are planning to see a destroyer soon – have barbecues with local police and Aboriginal Union officers, and learn about the value of visits to doctors and dentists in their lives.

Simple activities like a trip to the city can be an important part of shaping the way these children form a view of life away from their own sometimes difficult surroundings.

Currently with the help of the St George Foundation, the Klub is beginning work on an Indigenous Culture and Leadership program. This is a vital part of the Klub's work – a practical way of showing children some of the best role models and how they too can shape their lives for success in the outside world.

Now the Klub wants to offer more involvement with not just the children but with parents of both indigenous and non indigenous backgrounds, as well as promoting interaction between the families.

The Klub aims most of its work at four- to seven-year-old children – that is the age group Margaret feels is most impressionable.

"If young ones don't learn to relate in a positive environment they will always believe that is the way life has to be," she says. "If you have a negative seven days a week and no up-sides, they will never know that it can be better."

The Kids Klub philosophy is to provide a space where children can engage in fruitful activity in a secure and affirming environment. It is proving very successful with children learning to



Tenderness, fun and hope in a caring environment

The St George Foundation has distributed nearly \$1 million to help Australian children – not just the disabled or handicapped, but gifted children as well. Young musicians and athletes have had their careers kickstarted by grants from the foundation, which is set up with capital from the St George Bank and charity events.

And for some young children in Sydney who might not get to hear about St George for several years yet, the bank is an invisible but practical busy grandmother.

Australia's future with assistance from

st.george foundation
HELPING CHILDREN BE THE BEST THEY CAN BE

FIGURE 2

In this advertisement (FIG 2), whereby the Bank of St George is sponsoring a Sydney church in a community project, Christian spirituality and corporate ethics may conjure mixed emotions at best. Promoting the corporate in social welfare roles that historically, have been met by church or government, are complex versions of giving and

questionable spaces for the spirit in media. When 'giving' is a secondary aim to the primary goal of publicity, its positive effect is at risk. The role of the church is particularly visible when translated through the lens of corporate sponsorship, and such narratives of compassion do not hide commercial motivations, presenting these communications simultaneously as self-congratulatory and co-celebratory.

Nonetheless, corporate largesse is difficult to criticise because marginalised and disadvantaged people in the community stand to gain. The sponsor also has a reason to celebrate, and so does the consumer. Giving somewhat selfishly in this new moral market is possibly more common than we may like to think, and better than not giving at all. Simons cites managing director of National Australia Bank, Don Argus, saying 'Ours is not so much an age of reason as an age that is seeking reasons'...believing that corporations spanning geographical cultures need to be 'values driven' and to 'make clear what they believe'. Argus suggests that 'social capital is being eroded, and that corporations have a role in its replenishment' (Simons, 1996, p. 4).

The social justice role of the church is also considered to be a useful angle for soft news. However, strategies of ideological containment that are characteristic of news may distance the church as institutionalised compassion:

The church that is audible and visible in the media is primarily the Catholic and Anglican churches that have a lot of lobby power and political power, especially the Catholic church. I mean I find here in Australia they do have immense power, we do hear about them a lot, they're involved in a lot of educational, welfare and social justice issues...and that's what we hear about. But the church as a church, and not as a welfare institution, I don't think we hear anything about. We don't hear anything about the spiritual side of the church, we hear about the welfare side.

(RESPONDENT 11)

To some people, a reduction of the church (in media representations) to being 'just' a social justice apparatus, may erode our sense of collective spirituality. To others it is an example of God's hand in the community and a way of working together.

Form and content are convenient ways to manage media meanings, but spirituality is an unmanageable enterprise that should not be ignored. The spirit may use its own unique timing, and particular placings of people in circumstantial moments, in order to co-author a tripartite confluence of the divine, the media and the audience. Inexpensive Christian programs for example, in pre-dawn timeslots where audience reach is poor, may communicate spirituality better than expensive productions in prominent timeslots.

Some of the shows in the early hours of the morning [have] reached a lot of people, especially young people on drugs, they come home and just turn on the TV and God has spoken to them through something on television. It's too early in the morning...but even through that God catches the people that really need to hear.

(RESPONDENT 4)

Although the spirituality of an audience is not determined by form and content, new forms of media are emerging with new spaces for the spirit, and, in a more creative approach, communicators may work to break through tired and worn moulds of meaning about the Christian religion, with a more open, 'out there', and non-judgmental interest in what Christians are passionate about today.

MEDIA AND THE SACRED

The sphere of awareness that makes up the sacred means many things to people of many traditions, even for people within a tradition, such as Christianity, yet understanding the concept demands a language that is central to our being. The sacred is both private and public, and is informed by not only ceremonial and other tangibly experienced meanings, but also by intangible and internal values. At the heart of the Christian experience of the sacred are pleasure and desire, collective experiences bringing meanings of great importance, of passion, trust, joy and respect.

Sacred meanings for Christians are dependent on and communicated by the Holy Spirit, and this chapter explores two interpretive enterprises - media constructions and audience subjectivity. It will become apparent that, although a sense of the sacred might be negotiated by media through popular culture in representations of movements such as the New Age, media explorations of contemporary Christian spirituality are confined to more established and manageable meanings. Mass media can be seen as resistant to meanings that don't fit traditional religious moulds, and reluctant to represent the sacred in its fullness. In essence, things are only sacred on media terms, and the sacred is being tamed to fit media spaces for the spirit.

The advent of literacy had a monumental effect on how we communicate sacred meaning, and media technology continues to have great significance. Spiritual meaning has been displaced from being solely in the widely inter-relating oral domain, and became fixed in part to authoritative abstract code. Once framed by literacy, Christian

spirituality became transportable and susceptible to the conditions of both formulaic secular ideology and religious dogma. The interrelating, personal, spiritual sphere was at risk of becoming the dogmatic, public, ideological sphere.

From a macro perspective, this can be constructed as a process moving through broad global processes under the colonizing rationale of western thought; from great sacral communities to the idea of nation. The 'monopolies of knowledge' described by Innis (1991, p. 35), originated as 'a strata of bilingual intelligentsia', that mediated 'between the vernacular and Latin, between heaven and earth' (Anderson, 1991, p. 15). According to Anderson's writings on the origin of the nation, the 'non arbitrariness' of the sign gave way to a 'privileged system of re-presentation' of the 'great sacral truth languages' of Church Latin, Qur'anic Arabic, and Examination Chinese. These monopolies of knowledge held together great sacral communities such as Christendom, the Islamic Ummah and the Chinese Middle Kingdom, which understood themselves as 'cosmically central, through the medium of a sacred language linked to a superterrestrial [literate] order of power' (Anderson, 1991, p. 12-13). Sacred scripture was constructed as more than human – touched by the divine. However, in the case of western Christianity, the project of literacy saw the sacred consciousness of religious communities and dynastic realms replaced by imaginings of nation:

In Western Europe the eighteenth century marks not only the dawn of the age of nationalism but the dusk of religious modes of thought. The century of the Enlightenment, of rationalist secularism, brought with it its own modern darkness. With the ebbing of religious belief, the suffering which belief in part composed did not disappear. Disintegration of paradise: nothing makes fatality more arbitrary. Absurdity of salvation: nothing makes another style of continuity more necessary. What then was required was a secular transformation of fatality into continuity, contingency into meaning...[which bore] the idea of nation. (Anderson, 1991, p. 11)

One can imagine with Anderson, the great sacral community of Christianity being progressively debunked by the Enlightenment and replaced by the idea of nation. Yet, in a more recent restructuring, 'nations' are imagined more appropriately as international trade organizations or trans-national corporations. This enormous shift in sacred consciousness has moved over time from the intimate organic sphere, to the imperial literate sphere, to geopolitical communities of belief (nations), to even more abstract collections of human interest bounded by commerce and trade. Communities of faith have survived this noetic progression of sacred meaning. And so has the sacredness of scripture, as a text still believed to be inspired by God. But meaning-making now is maintained as more of a collaborative process rather than through authoritative religious regimes, as discussed by Wainwright and Munroe.

Polyvalence raises significant questions about the authority of the text...[which] is no longer simply an historical document that will yield historical meaning. Rather, it is a material artefact constructed in the act of meaning-making...What may initially be experienced as theological crisis can become interpretive crux of extraordinarily creative dimensions as the result of a new grappling with the nature of sacred text [with authorities of the text] shifted to communities of reading. (Wainwright & Munro, 1999, p. 80)

Such a re-installment of personal relations at the centre of meaning-construction enables ongoing discussion and negotiation, and has borne a diversity of interpretations for communities of faith.

This personal 'way' of the sacred has been opened up by political processes such as the Protestant Reformation, the separation of church and state, and national laws supporting freedom of the press. Although Christian spirituality no longer assumes space in the public sphere as a dominant ideology, it is communicated with immense

freedom at the margins. What was once largely expected/conventional 'sacred' practice in middle Christendom, is now more about personal experience and choice. In a gradual paradigm shift, the construction of church hierarchy has moved from vertical academic power structures, to non-hierarchical, faith and prayer-based models of leadership. This move towards decentralization is re-modeling structures that were in place around 300AD prior to Constantine I, where it is thought that more than 500,000 Christians were meeting in people's homes. Power then was not hierarchical, but relational. When Constantine made Christianity the state religion however, religious power became centralized and 'un-churched' Christians were persecuted and killed. Today, one might ask if mass media might be unintentionally continuing with this oppression, in that it works to privilege meanings that conform to marketable versions of Christian ideology. A secular sensibility in media production tolerates innocuous representations of Christian practices by serving an elite, commercial extravaganza façade, but wider subaltern voices that oppose such meanings are resisted in mass media representations of Christian spirituality.

Despite this, ministries that would once have been considered dissident are now accepted in the Christian community as mainstream. Christian ministry, including the more traditional churches, have made a significant return to people's homes; in prayer groups, study groups, youth gatherings and intercessionary meetings. This presents two problems for the media. The *ordinariness* of this sacred structure dispels critical discourses on power, and, everyday domestic locations do not hold the visual fascination as traditional, exotic churches have in the past. Secondly, reconnection with God today cannot be contained with any predictability, and presents a potential

extraordinariness that is too personally confronting, a dynamic that can demand risky disruptions to media form.

Christian spirituality is an important interpretive filter with personal and psychoemotional dimensions that participate in the production of meaning, and perhaps it is pointless to argue that our sense of the sacred needs better media representation. For Christians, the Holy Spirit is both universal and particular, an external and internal dimension that can be drawn on as a reference point for unlimited possibilities of meaning. And although many Christians may be distressed by misrepresentation, they do not see media itself as necessarily important to discovering meanings about God:

[B]elief in God is something that we have to discover for ourselves, and it is our belief, it is not factual evidence, so I can't see how any medium other than our soul can reach that knowing. (RESPONDENT 11)

There is a general view that God is unrepresentable through the mass media - unless he is representing himself; that the relationship of media to the sacred sphere can be seen simply as having varying degrees of openness towards spiritual meanings. Respondents in this study spoke of God in terms of a personal relationship that could not be represented in the media. For people seeking the sacred, quiet non-mediated spaces are constructed as important:

I go into the desert - by this I mean a quiet place away from my normal environment of work and people - to experience God, to listen, [which] seems to bring about a vision, a solution to my problems. (RESPONDENT 2)

Arthur cites Schleifer as supporting a view that television is 'anti-meditative' and has 'extreme difficulty in handling religious material' and that 'no iconic sense of the inner self is revealed'. Indeed, the question of any medium's capacity to capture spirituality is

a fundamental problem for religious communication, especially in the televisual assumption that 'what is not visible does not exist' (Arthur, 1993, p. 15). For Christians, spirituality is an omnipresent given, communicated by people and the environment:

[God] communicates to us through the beauty of the natural world, the glory of the sunset, rainforests, his mighty oceans, wildflowers...He speaks to us through the loveliness and innocence of little children, and the dignity of the old, at peace with themselves. Most of all He communicates through the loving kindness of good people who reach out to others in their pain and loneliness. For every evil deed in this world there are a hundred good ones which go unnoticed. (RESPONDENT 7)

I enjoy nature, I feel touched by colours, I feel the shape of the trees, the shades, the colours of the birds, in that sense I experience God very very much. Nature is relaxing and it is actually filling me spiritually, filling my eyes, filling my whole being, and leaving me happy for it, like light hearted in a certain sense, and more spiritual in the sense that God is manifesting Himself, and it is the same with people, you know when I meet people it leaves me sometimes in the same way as nature leaves me. (RESPONDENT 2)

Such responses position humanity and the environment as primary media for God, and may suggest that technological media has yet to find fluency in the sacred sphere. Babin asks if exposure to technological media could affect one's sense of the sacred. He compares the practices of a group of Indigenous people living in the Canadian wilderness, whereby children's nostrils are plugged and eyes are covered after birth to better their sense of hearing, with the average American adolescent who spends 20,000 hours viewing television and 10,000 hours at school (Babin, 1991, p. 96).

According to Davis, western consciousness has carried pre-modern 'myth' from the organic public sphere to the visceral technological sphere, drawing on pre-modern 'memories' of the sacred to make sense of the world today, particularly in times of rapid change:

Things are becoming so complex, there is so much information [and] so little traditional forms of thinking, of being, of relating, that have survived the tumult of globalization, of information technology and the ecological crisis. All of these things are happening so fast and drastically, that what is happening on a cultural level, even if it is not noticed by individuals, is that we turn towards myth as a way of organizing this chaos, so that suddenly [myth] is a way of getting at feelings that we have, unconscious feelings, almost dreamlike feelings about the moment that we live in, that our rational minds can't process. I think it's no accident that we turn to these narratives in times of crises and tumult, and I don't see that changing. (Davis, 1999, ABCRN)

This process is exacerbated by an intense fascination with the idea of human obsolescence. Western humanity is absorbed in electronic soundscapes and visionscapes, and is moving towards experiencing community in virtual worlds. Incessant interruptions and reconfigurations of the real reduce access to *embodied* spiritual meanings that are constructed in deep communications with other people, face to face. Increasingly, the space:time conflux where meanings are made is not an organic place or time, but re-presented time in predetermined places. Springer cites science fiction writer Ballard, who positions fiction and reality in the past decade as increasingly reversed.

We live in a world ruled by fictions of every kind – mass merchandising, advertising, politics conducted as a branch of advertising...increasing blurring of and intermingling of identities of consumer goods...For a writer in particular it is less and less necessary [to] invent the fictional content of his novel. The fiction is already there. The writer's task is to invent reality. (Springer, 1996, p. 330)

Horsfield shares Goethals' view that TV has an 'iconic' culture-shaping role (Goethals, 1993, p. 25), and that 'Australian urban and suburban society has become an environment so shaped by [science and technology, that] God is not only apparently absent but is functionally no longer necessary' in our new symbolic environment

(Horsfield, 1993, pp. 42, 44). Horsfield cites Jacques Ellul pointing out that ‘ideology is inherent in technology...[and this has] implications for social and religious meaning and expression’ (Horsfield, 1993, p. 44). Likewise, Cover argues that the impersonal power structures of corporatised technology make ideology and media subservient;

We human beings, called to a covenantal relationship with God and humanity, and made in God’s image and likeness, are being reduced to mere tools of the corporations of technology and the commercial world. In a world of broken relationships and individual isolation, we have come to seek our solace in the panaceas and dreams provided by the consumer society, where ‘freedom’ is equated with ‘choice’ of material goods. (Cover, 1993, p. 210).

Advertising capitalizes on the power of emotion as an inroad to the private sacred sphere. Expensive products demand ‘high involvement’ communications to bring the consumer to a purchase decision (Arens & Bovee, 1994, p. 219), and sacred archetypal values can provide a hook for textual engagement. The succinct entertainment value in the Toshiba campaign (FIG 2) for example, succeeds by subverting sacred Christian values. Without the notions of *patience*, *love*, *encouragement* and *humility*, Toshiba would be at a loss for words.



FIGURE 2

Dahlgren notes that while media theory establishes that audiences are active producers of meaning, there is also argument that audiences are the end products of a

market driven media ideology (Dahlgren, 1998, p. 299). In a circular process, identities are discursively generated via media culture, media industries trade audience profiles with advertisers and spin-doctors, who then produce emotional fictions to entertain particular psychographics. Spirituality and emotion, both of which may be perspectives that are failing in the real, are idealized, aestheticised and commodified by and through the media. We are seduced into consuming lavishly funded substitutes for spiritual needs. Qantas is the 'spirit of Australia', a Lexus car will 'set your soul free', diamonds are 'forever', and 'when the world ends, make sure that you see it on Foxtel'.

One respondent positions the value system in consumerism as preventing us from authentic experiences of God's spirit. When asked to comment on the advertisements in FIGURE 2, her response, after initially saying that it was 'just marketing', was:

We are spirits having an earthly experience, not human beings having a spiritual experience...and so the things that prevent us from feelings of the spirit I think separate us from God...if it's pride that we won't pray...or envy, that becomes consuming, [or] lust, and we lie or cheat someone to get what we want.

(RESPONDENT 12)

Goethals notes that televisual myth 'defines the world and our place in it'...offering 'public shared symbols' which answer the questions of 'Who am I?' and 'Who are we'? Television presents 'a consistent and integrated system of belief and social interpretation as a pattern for social understanding [which] does not reflect the diversity of social reality'. Goethals stresses that the biggest myth of all is the belief that we live in a truly democratic and open information system, from which two dogmas are drawn. Firstly, if something important has happened, we will hear about it; and secondly, if we don't hear or see it in the media, it hasn't happened or is not important (Goethals, 1993, p. 25-31). Horsfield holds a similar view:

Television programming repetitively presents a particular and consistent dramatic view of the world and life: what is good and what is bad, what has reality and what does not have reality, what power is and who holds power, how relationships would be conducted and how one should behave in particular situations. (Horsfield, 1993, p. 44)

Where the mass media has no interest in the spirit, such a series of propositions work to exclude the sacred from the public sphere. Perhaps the media are adequately serving audiences with traditional representations of Christian meanings, for example, in the televising of traditional church services, or Mother Theresa's work. However, while these are valid Christian experiences, they tend to be over-represented in the media, denying space for non-traditional meanings for the wider church body.

The non-traditional Australian church experience can be identified in several ways. For example, fewer people attend church as audience; preferring now to go as participants. And while there is a continuing Christian concern for social justice, approaches to resolving inequalities are now more internalized and personal. While physical and financial support to people in need continues to be recognized as a core individual responsibility, the corporate tool of today's church is prayer, and there is no shyness in calling on the spirit of God to bring about change. Such radical approaches to resolving social injustices are resisted by the mass media.

Postmodern thought liberates truth as a negotiable concept. Nonetheless, truth is an important element of the sacred that struggles for validity in the media. Personal spiritual truth is disallowed in a deification of diversity, and authentic experience can be lost in the postmodern politics of surfacing. The Christian religion too can be criticised for shunning intimate truth in relation to God, preferring secular morality narratives in

place of the demanding humility of spiritual truth. Forrester notes that characteristics of truth are demanding, confusing and disturbing, and against the Zeitgeist communication stream of the media. Truth is challenging and unexpected, and 'should arouse passion, not simply a cold intellectual interest'. Forrester adds that Christians often find the media 'threatening and dangerous, a competition rather than an ally, an idol rather than a place where truth may be encountered' (Forrester, 1993, pp. 71-77). In defence of truth, Forrester cites Soren Kierkegaard:

[T]ruth is something that is self involving...subjectivity is truth...it grabs one, challenges one, demands a response if it is to be known; truth is elected by love, and the truth is itself to be loved...there is not...a natural and universal tendency to recognize and follow truth. Human beings are in *error*, turned away from truth...They need to be surprised or startled if they are to turn towards the truth and be reconciled to that from which they have been alienated. (Forrester, 1993, p. 73-74)

While truth rightfully remains subjective and negotiable, more obvious gaps between truths held by the Christian community's spirituality, and its representation in the mass media, remain a concern. Despite highly developed negotiating skills, advertising research shows that audiences do 'buy in' to media fictions; fictions that often mimic spiritual truths. Meanwhile at the community level, spirituality is being experienced in new ways and in new places, most of which are unrecognized in media discourses. Traditional places of worship are still valid, but the church hierarchy has decentralized into the church body through the growth of 'home churches' and delegation of the role of ministry from a clergy 'class' to laity. Green notes, the best theologians are those who are 'coaches and witnesses rather than didacticians' (Green, 1999, p. 335). Christian leaders are valued mentors, encouragers, and spiritual partners for their communities of faith.

In what Harron refers to as 'The Second Reformation', a shift has occurred in Christianity whereby 'real, actual experience – of the individual and of the group – is always paramount. Conceptual or theoretical descriptions are suspect', and both liberal and conservative prescriptions for the human condition are 'regarded as useless and perhaps even destructive'. In postmodern worship, 'churchy language is meaningless' and 'God is experienced as radical transcendence and radical immanence'. Leaders are people with expertise in 'music, the arts, theology, philosophy, literature, poetry, graphic design and audio and video technology [and] ordained persons may or may not be in the team'. (Harron, 2000, p3).

Rather than becoming a diminished element of the public sphere, the sacred is expanded by interpersonal communication technologies. Communities of prayer are expanded through telephone trees, discussions are held on the internet, and scriptural readings are available on CD. Christian rock concerts, specialist publications and narrowcast services have burgeoned.

Other changes are notable. Public places are revisited by sacred community events: such as baptisms on beaches, theatre in the streets and prayer in public places. Indigenous Christian conventions take place in regional Australian showgrounds. Open meetings are held in non-church buildings such as homes and community halls. Table grace is said at MacDonald's. Someone struggling with substance abuse offers prayer in church. A friend performs a burial service. The spirit is present at all these sites and the sacred is enacted; however, such developments are rarely represented by broadcast media.

The 'absence' of God in the media contrasts with the following experience described by an Elcho Island woman, an experience that swept down through Indigenous communities in the Warburton Ranges, Leonora, Menzies and Kalgoorlie:

One day we felt God's Holy Spirit moving and touching each of us. We were sitting round the circle. People could see from outside a flame on each elder's head. We didn't know the flame of fire was on our heads. When everybody came out of the church they started to come and ask 'what's going on in the church? We saw the flame of fire when you were praying. (Guywanga, cited in Gill, 1994, p. 276)

Gill notes this revivalist movement grew until it attracted national attention through *Sixty Minutes* and *Nationwide* at Warburton. However, this too became another example of sacred meaning being tamed by the media. Jana Wendt's segment entitled *Miracle Days at Cement Creek* (12 September, 1982) appears to have been scripted to maintain a lucid distance from the irrational, unmanageable concept of spirituality, describing it somewhat subversively as 'the place that God forgot until it became the starting point for a remarkable crusade'. Gill notes that the program focused on the group as 'crusaders', describing them in conventional cliches as 'a kind of revival road-show, a Billy Graham look-a-like crusade for blacks, a lot of strong music, a bit of Bible and a finale with people coming forward to commend themselves to Christ' (Gill, 1994, p. 277). This story had potential to transfer deep spiritual meaning, but instead was constructed as a remote community event of novel significance.

Indigenous Christians are strengthening Australian Christianity with new spiritual pleasure in the sacred. However, Aboriginal Christianity is a very difficult concept for the media to represent. To interrogate entrenched morality discourses about indigenous culture by accepting the possibility that the spirituality of a colonizing people could actually *be at one* with an indigenous people (despite the injustices of

paternalism and cultural displacement for example), presents disruptive contradictions that risk intellectual:moral integrity. Although Indigenous Christians speak of Jesus as 'the in-between one' who stands between races (Piggin, 1994, p. 267), the mass media are reluctant to explore the possibility of Indigenous Christian meanings when complex ethical questions collide, preferring instead to shelter behind more established moral code. This tends to represent Aboriginal Christianity as an example of cultural displacement or victims of cultural imperialism, while denying the authenticity of experiences of many Indigenous Christians.

In an increasingly globalised consciousness, relationships between the sacred and the mass media raise many questions. Does sacred space hold value in today's economic, moral and cultural rationale? Can sacred spaces be representative of audience interests, and how can spiritual differences between individuals, audiences and sacred communities co-exist? In terms of ownership and content laws is the shift towards deregulation effecting spaces for the spirit, and what role should public media play? How does the increasing importance of narrowcasting effect spaces for the spirit?

Despite the present lack of spaces for overt, non-hierarchical sacred meanings in broadcast media, communities of faith have survived. Christian spirituality has grown in the face of authoritarian church regimes, technology, intellectualism and consumerism. Perhaps attitudes of openness towards sacred times and spaces in the community, and recognition of the pleasures and desire implicit in personal experiences of the sacred, will eventually progress spirituality as a sphere of meaning deserving greater attention.

PLEASURE AND DESIRE

Pleasure and desire are so central to the Christian experience that they are often denied conscious acknowledgment. The very meanings of Christianity are acquired through spiritual searching, in a desire to know God, which is followed by experiences of pleasure found in spiritual communion and inspiration. Christians conceive of themselves as wired with desire, with a pre-written interest in the pleasure of a relationship with God. Relating to God is not an experience reserved for the holy or spiritually rich and is often found in times of humility, adversity, or despair. This perspective is offered here:

It took a real low for me to come to the point where I said 'I can't do this, that is the limit of my ability' and while I was probably searching all my life, either it was not the right time or I wasn't ready... there were people there pointing the way [but] I chose to know better, it was God's grace... I think that every human being has this desire that God has put inside us, a yearning to know Him, and I think people are trying to fill that void with all sorts of other things... As human beings we are capable of doing a lot of things in our own strength... [yet] you can sit in an absolutely rotten place... or lonely or busy place and still experience the peace of God... it does not depend on circumstance it is like a driving force that compels us to know more... God put that desire in us.

(RESPONDENT 8)

Pleasure and desire are difficult concepts to retrieve in discussions about media representations of Christian spirituality. Christian communities have overcome a history of formal religious dominance, coercion and corruption, however, this is a history that is still prominent in the wider public mind. The mass media have worked to eradicate biases of class, race and gender, but Christianity is a spiritual orientation that continues to be subverted in media by this bias of history which misrepresents the present:

The sad thing about the secular media is that it misunderstands Christianity altogether. A lot of the time [God is represented] as a far off with a big stick, [and Christians as] toeing the line, as a bunch of goody goodies or a holy people. That's why I think whenever someone falls out, it becomes something [of interest to] the media, that [Christians] are not as they claim they are. The media takes joy in finding someone that has fallen, that is big news because they can sensationalise the whole thing, it is a fallen ideal. [This] goes totally against the grain of Christian teaching actually, that you at least speak of what is worthy and what is good.

(RESONDENT 3)

The aim of this chapter is not to repudiate popular media representations of pleasure, but to reclaim pleasure and desire as part of the Christian experience of God, to include spirituality as a site for pleasure and desire. There is no intention to join 'the long tradition of attacks on television...[by using discourses of] morality, the law, or aesthetics', in order to suppress popular representations of pleasure, which according to many commentators is 'typically classed as an indulgence, the expression of selfishness, idleness, vanity and thus productive of guilt' (Fiske, 1987, pp. 227-228). Such generalisations become a nonsense when ethnic, indigenous, or other marginalised communities of belief disenfranchise themselves from popular inscriptions of pleasure as a solely sensual or material experience, simply because such versions are offensive to their spirit. It is not that Christianity wants to compete in this sphere; it simply cannot compete because it has different terms of reference. The dominant promotion by the mass media of a material culture as desirable and pleasurable, is denying communications of pleasure for a spiritual culture.

Fiske cites Barthes to stress that pleasure 'is not to be found in the text itself, but in its conjuncture with the reader' (Fiske, 1987, p. 227). Likewise, spirituality escapes all observation and documentation, and is present only as 'qualia', the 'elusive felt

phenomenal quality associated with experience' (Blackburn, 1996, p. 524). Nonetheless, media have a tremendous capacity to communicate pleasure to communities of faith because readerships and audiences closely parallel spiritual communities in that they are shared bodies of consciousness. This media capacity to communicate pleasure is highly developed in constructions of local and global events such as sport, or in the large talkative readerships of soap opera, however, pleasures that are specific to the collective spiritual experience of Christianity are simply not available in popular media.

Blackburn describes *pleasure* as 'resistant to quantitative treatments...a surprisingly complex concept, although central to any account of human and animal motivation'.

Perhaps the simplest theory of pleasure treats it as being on the same dimension as pain: a bodily sensation, but of a positive kind, where pain is of a negative kind. This however fails to account for cases where we take pleasure in an activity or from receiving a piece of news...Pleasure seems more to be a quality of consciousness, intimately connected to contentment or happiness, rather than another element within conscious experience. (Blackburn, 1996, p. 289)

Bullock, Strallybass and Trombley define *desire* as a French term. As used in Lacanian psychoanalysis, desire 'takes on a more specific connotation than the English word *wish*'. In contrast to Freudian thought where unconscious desire can be fulfilled in some ways, for Lacan, desire is kept repressed and is 'intrinsically unfulfillable' because it is 'for something else which is always missing in us'.

It is desire for the other (mother, for example) who will never fill our own lack of being, however hard she might try, but it is also desire for [the Other's desire] by which we are captured. Unlike need or demand, which can be partially satisfied by a particular object, the only object of desire is an originally lost object. (Bullock, et al, 1988, p. 219)

This Lacanian definition has interesting similarities to, and differences from, notions of desire held in Christian spirituality. The enduring quality of desire is similar, but the 'unfillable' aspect needs qualifying. Pleasure is maintained by a relationship with God, however, desire is only unfulfilled if the relationship with God is abandoned. This happens from time to time in every Christian journey, however, it is reversible as a normal experience of spiritual growth. That Christians are 'captured' by God's desire for them, is easy to imagine if a connotation of choice is still possible. Interestingly, the Lacanian sense that the object of desire is for something that was originally lost, may sound very familiar to Christians, with early scriptural narratives about humanity's separation from God.

Media academics recognize various pleasures that are constructed and consumed by audiences, and the communication of spiritual pleasure is not included:

I haven't seen anything [in the media] that has had a profound effect [on my experience of God]...I can't say that I have ever felt the pleasure and desire that I experience in personal times and in the sacraments [by] watching or listening to the media. (RESPONDENT 11)

Fiske discusses experiences such as enjoying a sense of community in the watching of sport, sharing in a sense of excitement in the winning of money, procuring voyeuristic power by watching 'real TV' or, (as Mulvey is cited in Fiske), by male fragmentation of the female body for a fetishised gaze (Fiske, 1987, p. 226). Explicit representation and recognition by media academics of spiritual pleasure however, can be constructed as particularly underdeveloped. To position spirituality as a legitimate domain for pleasure may demand not only an attitudinal, but a conceptual shift, both in academic and media production.

Perhaps live broadcasting may bring new genres that work to offer space for spiritual pleasure. This is not to say that mainstream media does not mediate pleasurable meanings already; such experiences are present at both deep and surfaced levels in media texts, whether intentionally represented or not. However, the desires of the spiritual collective are silenced by the advancement of specialised cultural and commercial interests competing through advertising, or through the hidden persuasion of public relations. In media culture, the lexicon for pleasure and desire is dominated by sexual ideology and the power narratives of commerce and consumption. There is disparity between sites of construction, whereby pleasure and desire are monopolized in texts representing sexuality and consumerism, and largely missing in media representations of spirituality. For the Christian spiritual collective, pleasure and desire are only partly experienced by the sexual dynamics of the body, and are worlds away from the lavishly funded promises of consumerism.

Nonetheless, this is not to say that Christians are not attracted to the comforts and enjoyment of materialism; indeed it is a core Christian struggle to position the welfare of the other above personal material gain. Likewise, pleasure and desire are an important part of Christian sexuality:

God has given us physical desires...in the Book of Songs it is very sensual, it's a wonderful thing...but it's not just the physical pleasures, it is the pleasures of loving other people, doing things for other people, not because we think we have to, it is the love of God that moves us...it gives me great pleasure to just encourage someone, just ringing someone up

(RESPONDENT 8)

Perhaps more disappointing than the absence of a Christian dimension to media representations of pleasure and desire are popular distortions about Christianity that

work to exclude meanings of spiritual pleasure. Mass media has a capacity to burden communities of faith by reinscribing the idea of moral tasks of religion, keeping alive oppressive religious meanings that have long been rejected by many contemporary Christians. Positioning Christianity as something that demands performances of moral tasks, in order to be accepted by God, is possibly the most common media misrepresentation. Another media narrative is that Christians are motivated to 'get in good with God', because this has rewards. Such redundant discourses of reciprocity were actually invalidated by Christ's death, and have been falling out of the Christian mindset since the 1500's Reformation, when Luther argued that forgiveness is given through faith and grace rather than earned through a satisfactory moral record or the purchase of 'indulgences'.

Recent assumptions about pleasure and desire, such as those put forward in Marr's book critiquing religion in Australia, present a limited view from a rather isolated and diminishing perspective on Christian sexual consciousness. Windsor's review (1999, p. 3) of Marr's book *High Price of Heaven*, conveys Marr's positioning of the church as an institution that perceives pleasure 'and its medium the body' as 'suspect, if not downright reprehensible', even a 'core evil' to the Christian consciousness. Marr's suggestion that the church is 'in the business of sin' is an outmoded focus on religious doctrine that has vanished, and ignores supportive and inter-relating communities of faith in the multidimensional Christian collective today. Christianity has not departed from discussions of sexual and other moralities, but rather has arrived at it, with an enabling from within; from a spiritual relationship based on love. This meaningfulness is intimate and truthful, but can also be open, playful, and remarkably adventurous.

Clearly, the dominant regimes of religious ideology, as represented by much mass media, have miserably failed. Restrictive narratives of Christian pleasure and desire represent a pre-postmodern era that is swiftly passing. However, a legacy of stereotypes remain in media, circulating meanings that even the most hardened sceptic might dismiss as stale intellectual code.

Sally Planalp asks why the complex phenomenon of emotion - the legitimate domain of psychologists, sociologists, anthropologists, philosophers, and historians - is not researched more seriously from the domain of communications (Planalp, 1998, p. 71). This is particularly pertinent to advertising, where emotion is so clearly commodified. Advertising delves into the intelligent world of emotion, to transfer sacred pleasures (love, trust, friendship and joy) from the ordinary and everyday, and relocate them as inherent to particular commodities. This profane translation of the sacred seduces consumer audiences into *purchasing spiritual pleasures*, in a marketing process similar to what Maslow calls the 'self actualisation' stage, to satisfy high-end 'socially acquired wants' (Maslow, cited in Arens & Bovee, 1994, p. 124). In collaboration with the reader however, spirituality works around this process. While advertising plays with pleasures that may parallel our spiritual perspectives, the multi-dimensional intuitive reader is underestimated at the advertiser's peril.

The advertisement for Toshiba (FIGURE 3) for example, is targeting the technologically elite consumer through the popular aesthetic of race and culture. This racial discourse succeeds through secularised egalitarianism and humanity's socially acquired desire to be at one with the 'mythologised' other, and this text is explicitly raced to construct a

currency of friendship. Surprisingly, Toshiba's agency did not choose to reverse the colonial discourse and play with the idea that consumers could be at one with Tonto through technology, or that Tonto could have the Lone Ranger as his mobile computer. The Lone Ranger:Tonto narrative here aims to redeem the privileged Euro-centric consumer with a reassuring endorsement of friendship. Such disregard for emotional integrity emaciates the spiritual sphere and any sincere interest or love for the other.

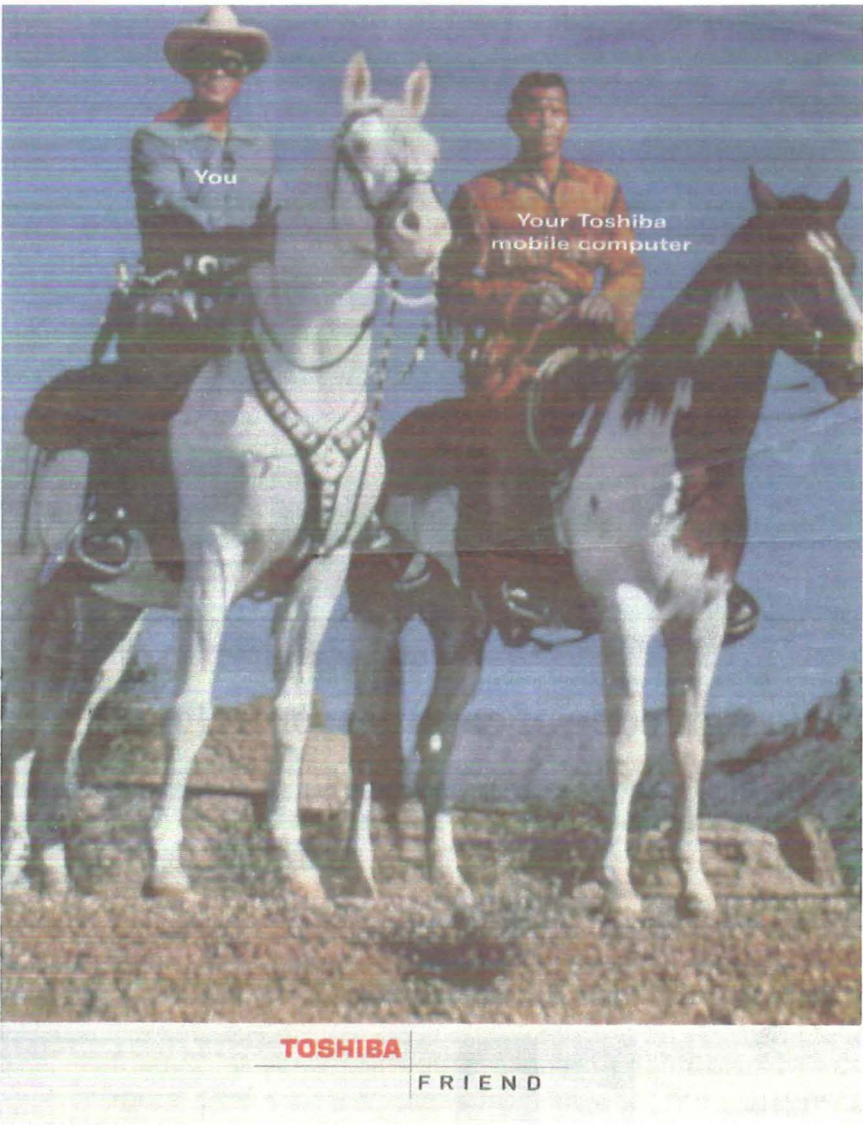


FIGURE 3

Pleasure and desire are narrowly represented in the media by elaborate constructs of sexuality and consumerism. But for some special pleasures, media might be moved to communicate wider spiritual meanings; such as a reunification with the environment as a 'highly relational conception of reality' (Cowdell, 1999, p.100). Piggin cites Nyiwula Dhurrkay's experience, for example, during an all night prayer meeting, when, at about 4a.m. 'the Spirit came' (Dhurrkay cited in Piggin, 1994, p. 266). The people knew it was the Holy Spirit when 'a cloud came from the east and rested upon them... they were in the midst of God's presence and they became cold, which in a hot climate is the way the Spirit graciously presents himself' (Piggin, 1994, p. 267). Such meanings about the environment, and about pleasure and desire in environmental terms, may well be a site where the Holy Spirit can be represented as part of the Christian experience of God. While this may challenge audiences at levels that media industries may refuse to venture into, it would be a refreshing alternative to the scientific and commodified constructs of the environment currently on offer, such as natural science documentaries and travel magazines.

Babin (1991, p. 114-113) suggests that in our highly audiovisual and digital media age, we are tired of scientific rationalism, doctrine and ideology, and emotion and pleasure have become our guide to truth. He claims that rather than rejecting 'true' pleasure we need to pursue it... and that the deeper our desire, the greater our pleasure will be. He cites St Augustine's writings around 400AD saying pleasure is a 'source of revelation' that offers the possibilities of spiritual pleasure:

I would state firmly: you are only partly drawn by your will. You are more drawn by total pleasure. But what does that mean, being drawn by total pleasure?...There is a pleasure of the heart for the one who tastes the sweetness of this bread of heaven. If the poet was able to

say, 'Each man is drawn by his pleasure, not by necessity, but by pleasure, not by obligation, but by delectation' how much more emphatically ought we to say that - we who are drawn toward Christ, the man who finds his delights in truth...blessedness...justice...eternal life...Or ought we to say that our bodily senses have their pleasures and that the soul is deprived of its pleasures? (St Augustine, cited in Babin, 1991, p. 113)

Although concepts of good and evil are complex, it is interesting to note that the Greek word *kalokagothia*, combined 'good' and 'beautiful', to equate all things good as beautiful. Plato spoke about beauty as 'beauty makes truth splendid', emphasising 'the depths of one's being' (Babin, 1991, p. 110).

To engage as many readers as possible, visual media specialises in hyper-aestheticising practices when representing sexuality, lifestyles, nature, sport, war and violence. Beauty is a concept encoded in these dialectics, and one that Babin explores by talking about the nature of pleasure. While 'beauty' is highly codified in media, Babin conceptualises beauty as something that is not aesthetic but rather 'an intimate link between knowledge, emotion and pleasure'...a kind of 'human fullness'. He adds, 'we cannot define beauty without expressing God...beauty is revealing what underlies beings and things...it is impossible to speak of the way of beauty without speaking of the way of pleasure' (Babin, 1991, pp. 112, 113). Such pleasure resides in the everyday, and its appreciation is likely to be universal.

I derive a great joy in watching people, how they act and react under different circumstances...I met a lady at church once, it wasn't the physical attraction that attracted me, but the way she was talking, the way she was smiling...like her spirit came through almost the way she talked. It really created a great impact on me and brought me to think 'what an extraordinary being'...not very intellectual, not very learned, and yet there was something about her [that gave me pleasure]...something deeper, something spiritual. (RESPONDENT 2)

When visiting Corsica, Babin questioned some older people sitting under a tree about the beauty of the landscape, and their reply was not 'yes it is beautiful' but rather 'yes we feel good here'. Similarly, when saying to them that their village is beautiful, their response was 'do you feel good in our village?' Also, in Zaire 'a person is only called beautiful if he or she is loved and lovable, and the word beauty is not used to describe children. People then speak only of spirit' (Babin, 1991, p. 111). Respondent '10' explains pleasure as something borne out of love:

[T]here is pleasure in serving and giving, there is joy in serving God...and this is not to seek approval, as Jesus said I love you already, even when you hated me I still loved you...like if you compare two women that are married, one might try to win the love of her husband, trying to seek approval, well that's not the God of the Bible. Then the other woman, she does things for her husband because she knows she is loved...there is pleasure in that

(RESPONDENT 10)

Such desire in pleasing God may invite scepticism in media, defining such versions of pleasure as self-sacrificing submission. However, this respondent explains:

Christian spirituality to me is about my relationship with God. I'm not sure if non-Christians realise that the reason why we live a Christian lifestyle is not to gain favour with God, because God has already changed us, this is what His spirit has done for us. Our yearning is to please God, it's not to please ourselves.. not because we have to but because we choose to, it's a relationship thing that's never at an end point, there is always more to it, all the time.. [In the media] I'm not sure what is worse: to treat God as totally irrelevant or to treat Him as someone to be feared, like you do the right things because you're frightened, instead of the desire to please God and the pleasure of pleasing someone that you love.

(RESPONDENT 9)

Further elements of pleasure and desire that are denied by media are brought about by omissions of media representations of older people and children. Older people are aesthetically and culturally problematic for many media genres, and children are

commodified in advertising, and considered to be too expensive to factor in to production costs of other popular media texts. Older people and children hold core meanings about spirituality, yet from the age of four, children are severed from the tutelage of their parents and grandparents for a supposedly more important curriculum-based 'education'. This twelve year program, together with extra-curricular learning and the omnipresent influences of mass media, are significant shapers of our spiritual identity. Spiritual reference points that were once transferred by our older people, - whose cultural and spiritual knowledges become more condensed over time - are now communicated by advertising, sport, sitcoms and news.

Now that age demographics are changing, producers and advertisers are giving older people space in the media. However, socially-learned values such as unconditional respect (naturally with some exceptions), are necessary for quality intergenerational communication, and are difficult to retrieve when representing older people.

In the Western world, we have lost the art of relating. Modern society is based on self interest rather than community...individualism is our attempt to obtain worth and meaning. But is individualism destructive to Christianity? Yes. I have personally struggled with the thought of being swallowed up into some sort of Divine community, when it could mean that I would lose 'me' (Farrell, 1997, pp. 9-10).

The leap from individualistic to communal thinking is in deep contradiction to many media meanings; particularly in advertising in a consumer culture. However, offering a sense of community is also something that media does well, and is particularly valued as an audience experience in programs such as sport, comedy and news. This capacity is underdeveloped in the communication of spiritual pleasures from the Christian faith orientation.

Since media have become so integral to human communications, an important concept to remember for humanity and the environment is to prioritize 'the real' as 'precious' (McKie, 1994, p. 26). As Berry notes, 'we have broken the great conversation and shattered the universe. We have shattered our souls' (Berry cited in Chew, 1999, p. 28).

We need to ask for readmittance to the sacred community of the natural world. We need to listen to the Earth...to discover the Earth within the depths of our being. Otherwise, any vision for the Great Southern Land of the Holy Spirit will be an empty shell. (Chew, 1999, p. 29)

Pleasures and desires will continue to manifest unpredictably and unchartably in countless ways, in the exotically ordinary real – both with and without the discourses of mass media. Nonetheless, the role of media is one of great importance. A moral allegiance to pluralism and a reluctance to talk about spiritual pleasures is a very disenchanting mix for Australian media and Christianity. And this will not change unless the public mind demands a re-opening of spirituality as a valid social space.

In this thesis I have investigated relationships between Christian spirituality, culture and Australian media; through a historical, technological, ideological and psycho-emotional framework. While I acknowledge validity in the many other spiritual traditions, my particular focus on Christianity in this project seeks to open up the topic within a manageable research perspective. This has established that spirituality is a social space of major significance, and one that is in need of attention in media studies. My overall aim has been to investigate what lies beneath difficulties in the representation of sacred meanings for the Christian faith, and to demonstrate that the communication of spiritual desires and pleasures are generally excluded in mass media. The cost of ignoring spirituality cannot be measured, but the desire to communicate it is clear.

APPENDIX 1

PRE - INTERVIEW INFORMATION

MEDIA STUDIES HONOURS THESIS Spaces for the Spirit: Holy Spirit Consciousness, as represented in Australian Media

Please read the questions before considering to take part in this research.

This interview will be taped (sound only). If you choose to take part, your responses will be kept anonymous in any transcription, storage or publication of this research. After transcribing the tape, I can return it to you if you wish.

These interviews will gather opinions about Christianity and the media. Aspects about Christian belief that you feel are important to you will be discussed, and if and/or how you think these are being represented in any Australian media.

The interview will also ask for thoughts about new ways to represent Christianity or God in various media.

Please speak as freely as possible as all your thoughts are important.

It is equally important that you feel under no obligation to respond to any question that you may feel uncomfortable about answering. You are just as free to expand on one question as you are to withdraw from another. You may completely withdraw from the interview at any stage.

Please contact me if you would like to take part in this study.

NAME: JENNIFER ANNE JONES

PHONE:



APPENDIX 2

QUESTIONNAIRE

Are there elements of your experience of God that you **do not see** represented by the media?

What are your thoughts about **religion and God**, and do you think the media sometimes portrays them as the same thing?

What and where do you think the Christian '**church**' is today, and is this how the media positions the church?

In what ways do you feel **God communicates** to the world?
What are your thoughts about media technologies, people and God?

Have there been occasions when you have felt that the media has **enriched** your experience of God?

Can you talk about **pleasure and desire** with regard to experiencing God and the Holy Spirit, and have you seen this in any media representation of God?

Have there been occasions that the media has got it very **wrong** when representing Christianity?

What does **Christian spirituality** mean to you?
Are there any **important aspects** that you would like to see the media represent, perhaps in **new ways**?

Is there **anything else** you might like to say about communicating Christianity?

APPENDIX 3

AUDIENCE PROFILE

GENDER	AGE	ETHNICITY	CHURCH	INCOME
Male	70+	Australian	Protestant	Lower
Male	55-69	Italian	Catholic	Lower
Male	40-54	Chinese	Charismatic	Middle
Male	25-39	Indigenous Australian	Charismatic	Lower
Male	18-24	Scottish	Charismatic	Higher
Male	16	Australian	Protestant	Higher
Female	70+	Irish	Catholic	Middle
Female	40-54	Swiss	Charismatic	Middle
Female	40-54	Indonesian	Protestant	Lower
Female	40-54	American Indian	Protestant	Higher
Female	25-39	Greek	Orthodox	Middle
Female	25-39	Maori	Latter Day	Middle

NB: The financial question I asked did not offer income brackets to choose from, which I thought might be too invasive. I am therefore sceptical about the usefulness of this indicator, other than that it may reflect the respondent's opinion of roughly which income category - middle, lower or higher – that he or she felt they may be in.

APPENDIX 4

CHOICE OF RESPONDENTS

K = known to me prior to study

U = unknown to me prior to study

Australian Protestant	K	70+yo male
Italian Catholic	U	70+yo male, referred by minister
Chinese Charismatic	K	40+yo male
Australian Aboriginal Charismatic	U	25+ male, referred by minister
Scottish Charismatic	K	18+ male
Australian Protestant	U	16+ male, referred by minister
Irish Catholic	U	70+ referred by minister
Swiss Charismatic	K	40+ female
Indonesian Protestant	K	40+ female
Native American Protestant	K	40+ female
Greek Orthodox	K	25+ female
Maori Latter Day Saint	U	25+ female, referred by minister

APPENDIX 5

MEDIA	MEDIA & THEOLOGY	THEOLOGY & CULTURE	CULTURE
Allen	Anderson	Barnes	ABC JJJ
Arens	Arthur	Chew	Blackburn
Bartol	Babin	Cornwell	Blackmore
Cantor	Cover	Cowdell	Bullock
Carey	Crane	Cornwell	Blackburn
Cissna	Cover	Cowdell	Blackmore
Comer	David	DC Talk	Bullock
Crawford	Davies	Dalzeil	Clift
Cunningham	Davis	Eccleson	During
Dahlgren	Forrester	Farrell	Hall, S
Dyer	Gill	Green	Hofstadter
Esser	Goethels	Hall, J	Hall
Fiske	Horsfield	Harron	Jagtenberg
Dyer	Lorenen	Holy Bible	Jones
Esser	McDonnell	John Paul II	McKie
Fiske	Newman	Liberman	Muns
Geraghty	Slinger	Lusetich	Planalp
Geraghty	Muggeridge	McGrath	Rosenau
Goody & Watt	Wainwright	Moltmann	Simmons
Gurevitch	Youthworker	Murray	Springer
Hansen	Vos	Piggin	Taylor
Hartley		Sire	Weiss
Havelock		Windsor	
Heyer		Wright	

MEDIA	MEDIA & THEOLOGY	THEOLOGY & CULTURE	CULTURE
Innis		Piggin	
Jensen		Sire	
Jozajtis		Windsor	
Kingsley		Wright	
McLuhan			
Morley			
O'Shaughnessy			
Ong			
Pendakur			
Porush			
Tulloch			
Turner			

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